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**DELIVERING SOCIAL CHANGE**

# **Social Exclusion and Sport in Northern Ireland**

Prof Owen Hargie  
Dr Ian Somerville  
Dr David Mitchell

**2015**



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## **SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND SPORT IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

**Report on Research Funded by the Equality Directorate Research Branch,  
Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister**

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## Table of Contents

Executive summary .....	7
Acknowledgements.....	22
1 Introduction.....	23
1.1 Rationale .....	24
1.2 The policy background .....	26
1.3 Research objectives .....	30
2 Literature review .....	32
2.1 Introduction.....	33
2.2 Social exclusion and sport .....	35
2.2.1 Social exclusion.....	35
2.2.2 Sport .....	44
2.2.3 The relationships between sport and social exclusion .....	48
2.2.4 Sport and peacebuilding .....	54
2.3 Sports exclusion in NI .....	61
2.3.1 The NI context.....	61
2.3.2 Sport and the religious divide.....	65
2.3.3 Sport and women.....	77
2.3.4 Sport and socio-economic status .....	82
2.3.5 Sport and older people.....	85
2.3.6 Sport and disability.....	88
2.3.7 Sport and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people .....	92
2.3.8 Sport and ethnic minorities .....	98
2.4 Social inclusion through sport in NI.....	103



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2.4.1 Sports based interventions in NI .....	104
2.4.2 Evaluating sports based interventions .....	134
2.4.3 Conclusion.....	141
3 Qualitative findings.....	143
3.1 Methodology.....	144
3.1.1 Introduction .....	144
3.1.2 Sample.....	144
3.1.3 Procedures .....	146
3.1.4 Ethical issues .....	146
3.1.5 Data analysis .....	147
3.2 The religious divide .....	150
3.2.1 General perceptions.....	150
3.2.2 GAA .....	153
3.2.3 Soccer.....	159
3.2.4 Rugby .....	162
3.2.5 Overcoming sectarian barriers .....	164
3.2.6 Summary .....	169
3.3 Females .....	171
3.3.1 Women are not excluded.....	171
3.3.2 Perceived barriers to women's participation.....	173
3.3.3 Summary .....	177
3.4 Socio-economic status .....	179
3.4.1 Cost is a barrier .....	179
3.4.2 Sports opportunities exist to suit all budgets.....	182
3.4.3 Summary .....	183
3.5 Older people.....	185
3.5.1 Perspectives of people under 60 years old .....	185
3.5.2 Perspectives of people over 60 years old .....	189
3.5.3 Summary .....	191

---

3.6 Disability.....	193
3.6.1 General public perspectives .....	193
3.6.2 Perceptions of people with disabilities.....	197
3.6.3 Summary .....	200
3.7 LGB people.....	201
3.7.1 General public perspectives .....	201
3.7.2 LGB perspectives .....	207
3.7.3 Summary .....	211
3.8 Transgender people.....	212
3.8.1 Early experiences: sport and the sense of ‘being different’ .....	212
3.8.2 Changing rooms: a problematic environment .....	213
3.8.3 Recreation and the problems of appearing in public.....	216
3.8.4 The impact of sports exclusion.....	218
3.8.5 Summary .....	220
3.9 Minority ethnic groups .....	221
3.9.1 General public perspectives .....	221
3.9.2 Minority ethnic group perspectives.....	225
3.9.3 Summary .....	230
3.10 Sport and communication .....	232
3.10.1 Awareness of sports inclusion initiatives .....	232
3.10.2 Communication from sports organisations .....	236
3.10.3 Summary .....	241
3.11 Sport: positive or negative? .....	243
3.11.1 Positive aspects of sport .....	243
3.11.2 Negative aspects of sport.....	247
3.11.3 Summary .....	251
3.12 Conclusion .....	252
4 Quantitative findings.....	260

---

4.1 Methodology .....	261
4.2 Sport and schools .....	262
4.2.1 Results and analysis .....	262
4.2.2 Summary .....	265
4.3 Television viewing of sports .....	267
4.3.1 Results and analysis .....	267
4.3.2 Summary .....	269
4.4 Sport and the religious divide .....	271
4.4.1 Results and analysis .....	271
4.4.2 Summary .....	274
4.5 Sporting bodies and venues .....	276
4.5.1 Results and analysis .....	276
4.5.2 Summary .....	280
4.6 Sport and social inclusion .....	282
4.6.1 Results and analysis .....	282
4.6.2 Summary .....	286
4.7 Sport and change .....	288
4.7.1 Results and analysis .....	288
4.7.2 Summary .....	291
4.8 Sport and peace .....	293
4.8.1 Results and analysis .....	293
4.8.2 Summary .....	299
4.9 Sports participation and barriers .....	301
4.9.1 Results and analysis .....	301
4.9.2 Summary .....	306
4.10 Conclusion .....	307

---

5 Conclusion .....310

5.1 Main findings.....311

5.2 Key issues .....320

6 References.....325

Appendix 1: Interview questions .....350

Appendix 2: NILT survey module.....352

Appendix 3: NILT technical notes .....357

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# Executive summary

## Overview

- The Social Exclusion and Sport in Northern Ireland (SESNI) research project (July 2012 – December 2014) was conducted by Ulster University in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT), and funded by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), Equality Directorate Research Branch.

- The project was proposed and designed by Professor Owen Hargie and Dr. Ian Somerville, School of Communication, Ulster University, Jordanstown, in response to the 2011 Research Call of the cross-departmental Equality and Social Need Research Group. Dr. David Mitchell and Jenny Robinson (July 2012 – March 2013) were appointed as Research Associates. The project was overseen by a Steering Group comprising representatives of OFMDFM. The project received ethical approval from the appropriate Ulster University research ethics committee.

- As elaborated below, key findings include:

- 86% of survey respondents believe that sport is a good way to break down barriers between Protestants and Catholics, while 67% believe that sports-based peacebuilding projects are effective;
- 84% believe sports in Northern Ireland (NI) to be more open and inclusive than ten years ago;
- 52% of people do no sport or physical activity at all;

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- Participation and interest in soccer, Gaelic games and rugby continue to reflect the community divide, while a majority of people (57%) believe there is nothing wrong with different sports or teams being for Protestants or Catholics;
  - 51% of people agree that segregated schools are a major cause of segregation in sport;
  - More people believe that national anthems should remain part of sport in NI (42%) than believe they should be removed (36%);
  - Qualitative and quantitative findings reveal that progress has been made by the main sporting organisations in becoming perceived as more inclusive, but much work is still to be done;
  - Many women, less well-off people, older people, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, lesbian, gay and bisexual people (LGB), and transgender people, continue to face complex barriers to participation in sport and physical activity.

## **Research Objectives**

The objectives of the project were as follows:

- To understand the extent, distribution and causes of social exclusion in NI society, particularly in the sporting context.
- To chart current practice in relation to exclusion/inclusion in sport in NI.

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- To assist in the understanding of public perceptions and attitudes in respect of cohesion, sharing and integration in NI.
  - To contribute to the development of the statistical infrastructure on social exclusion in NI and provide specific statistical indicators on sport and social exclusion.
  - To facilitate and inform wider public debate on the issues of sport and social exclusion in NI.
  - To identify key issues to shape future policy development.

## **Methodology**

The project comprised three main phases/outputs:

- A review of relevant international academic and ‘grey’ literature in relation to social inclusion/exclusion and sport, including a survey of sports-based peace and social inclusion projects in NI.
- Qualitative research with a representative sample (n=104) of members of the public across NI. This involved using in-depth semi-structured interviews to gauge respondents’ views regarding their perceptions and experiences of inclusion/exclusion in sport. With the assistance of gatekeeper organisations, this sample included LGB people, transgender individuals, people with disabilities, and members of minority ethnic groups. A Qualitative Report, analysing and synthesising findings, was produced.

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- Quantitative research through the inclusion of a SESNI survey module in the 2013 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (n = 1210). The questions were informed by the Literature Review and Qualitative Report, and drawn up in consultation with NILT staff and the project Steering Group. A Quantitative Report, comprising statistical analysis and evaluation, was produced. For the purposes of statistical analysis, ‘don’t know’ responses were excluded and so percentage figures in the SESNI Report differ slightly from those on the NILT website.

## **Main findings**

- *In Northern Ireland there is a widespread public belief in the peacebuilding capacity of sport.* A significant majority of the survey sample (86%) believed that sport was a good way to break down barriers between Protestants and Catholics, while 67% believed that sports-based peacebuilding projects were effective in breaking down barriers between the two communities. Of those who had taken part in such a project, the figure for people who believed the projects to be effective was 91%. As a result, 79% of the sample felt that sports-based peacebuilding projects should receive greater funding, with only 6% disagreeing. Strong support for sport as a vehicle for peacebuilding was also found in the qualitative research. Furthermore, 84% believed sports in NI to be more open and inclusive than ten years ago.

- *Sports-based peacebuilding initiatives have the potential to reach a much wider audience.* Analysis of the survey results showed that younger people, males, those in higher level occupations, with higher qualifications, and who took part in sport regularly, were most likely to have taken part in these initiatives.



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- *A large number of people do not participate in sport or physical activity at all.* Over half of the sample (52%) reported doing no sport or physical activity in the last twelve months.

- *Many people are content with religious division in sport, and do not believe there will be significant change in the religious make-up of some sports.* For instance, 57% of survey respondents felt that there was nothing wrong with different sports or teams being for Protestants or Catholics; responses were similar among Protestants and Catholics, and across age categories. Furthermore, respondents were evenly divided with regard to whether they believed that sports would be more religiously diverse in ten years' time.

- *There is a public perception of the on-going link between religious division within the schools sector and sports segregation.* 51% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that segregated schools are a major cause of segregation in sport, with just over one-fifth (21%) of the sample disagreeing. These figures were similar for Protestants, Catholics and people of no religion. Nearly all interviewees provided examples of this link in their own lives.

- *Sporting colours, emblems and venues continue to be perceived as politico-religious markers.* Interviewees provided rich detail and telling anecdotes to illustrate the 'otherness' of certain sports venues, the manner in which sports emblems or even equipment could identify someone as a member of the out-group, and the related threat/anxiety that this may cause in particular areas.

- *The topic of national anthems in sport is contentious.* Opinion, as gauged by the survey, was closely divided, in that 36% agreed that anthems should not be part of sport in NI while 42% disagreed. Protestants were more attached to anthems than Catholics, with the youngest age category in the study (18-24 years) showing strongest support for anthems.

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- *Participation and interest in soccer, rugby and Gaelic games, all continue to be affected by the community divide.* From the interviewee responses, and the results of the survey questions on TV viewing and willingness to attend sports fixtures, it is clear that Gaelic games remain the preserve of Catholics. Rugby and soccer are more mixed overall, although there are divisions within the latter in relation to local and national team support.

- *The GAA remains largely outside of the experience of most Protestants.* Only 1% of Protestants had watched ‘a lot’ of Gaelic football in the last year compared to 31% of Catholics. Similarly, 39% of Protestants said they would attend a match in Casement Park if offered tickets compared to 78% of Catholics.

- *In regard to the GAA’s efforts to be socially inclusive, Protestants believe that it could and should be doing more to make Gaelic sports amenable to their tradition.* Thus, 40% of Protestants agreed that the GAA was taking active steps to welcome all traditions, compared to 72% of Catholics. Qualitative data from the interviews revealed Protestant disapproval of the GAA for its political associations with Irish nationalism, yet at the same time, positive recognition of its community spirit and organisational acumen, and respect for Gaelic sports *per se*.

- *Some Catholics also believe the GAA could and should be doing more to welcome all traditions.* Thus, 28% of Catholics disagreed that the GAA was taking active steps to welcome all traditions, while 78% said they would like to see more Protestants playing Gaelic sports. A number of Catholic interviewees were uncomfortable with the political associations of the GAA.

- *Perceptions of sectarianism surrounding NI soccer persist among some people.* This emerged most clearly in the qualitative data. A number of interviewees regarded soccer as divisive and some had had negative experiences at NI international matches in the past. A small number of survey

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respondents reported that sectarianism among fans at Windsor Park would put them off attending.

- *However, Catholics are quite positively disposed towards NI international soccer.* Thus, more Catholics (71%) than Protestants (65%) felt that the Irish Football Association was taking active steps to welcome all traditions. Two-thirds of Catholic respondents said they would like to see more Catholics supporting the NI international team, while only a slightly higher proportion of Protestants (60%) than Catholics (56%) said they would be willing to attend Windsor Park if offered tickets. Many interviewees commented upon the good work done by the Football for All campaign.

- *There is majority public support for an all-Ireland soccer team.* The survey found 54% of respondents in favour of this proposal. In terms of religious background, the majority in favour came from the Catholic community, with 70% supporting such a change compared to 39% of Protestants.

- *Rugby in NI is overwhelmingly regarded as inclusive and unifying.* TV coverage of Ireland rugby matches attracted equal levels of Protestant and Catholic interest (although Ulster rugby matches attracted a slightly higher proportion of Protestant viewers). A total of 83% of survey respondents believed that Ulster Rugby was taking active steps to welcome all traditions, including almost equal proportions of Protestants and Catholics. Ulster Rugby's ground was also regarded as the most inclusive of the three stadium sports; regarding willingness to attend a rugby match at Ravenhill, 69% of Catholics said they would attend if offered tickets, and 66% of Protestants.

- *Sport plays a comparatively minor role in the lives of women.* The present study confirms existing research to show that women watch less sport on TV, experience a lower level of enjoyment of sport at school, and participate in sport less than men; men were twice as likely as women to report

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doing ‘a lot’ of sport or physical activity in the last year. Many interviewees recognised that females face specific barriers to participation. Of the survey respondents who reported that lack of single sex sports/leisure provision, body image, and lack of childcare were barriers to their participation, an overwhelming majority were women. Furthermore, 59% of the survey sample believed that boys’ sports are seen as more important than girls’ sports in schools, while 53% thought that more TV coverage of female sport would increase female participation.

- *However, many people believe that women do not face sports exclusion.* For instance, although 46% of women agreed that they are second class citizens in NI sport, 32% of women disagreed. Regarding whether responsibility for a young family prevented women from participating in sport or exercise, 42% of the overall sample agreed but 40% disagreed. Some interviewees, both male and female, believed that the disparity in levels of participation, greater number of male than female sports clubs, and the different levels of media coverage of male and female sports, were simply a result of men and women having differing interests.

- *Older people are not widely perceived to face significant exclusion from sport.* Just 16% of survey respondents believed that sport and leisure facilities were not welcoming for older people. Most interviewees thought that age-appropriate sport/exercise opportunities existed for those older people who were willing to take advantage of them.

- *Nevertheless older people participate less in sport than younger people and are less likely to attend sporting venues.* This was evident from the survey findings regarding participation levels and willingness to attend the three main sports stadia. Interviewees noted that it may be particularly challenging to interest older people in sport and exercise if they have not been active earlier in life.

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- *People in the lowest socio-economic groups participate in sport least and are less likely to take part in a sports-based peacebuilding initiative than those in higher socio-economic groups.* This was demonstrated by the survey analysis which showed that people in higher-level occupational classifications were 1.8 times more likely to have taken part than those in the lower-level occupations, and people with A-level qualifications and above were 1.7 times more likely to have taken part than those with GCSEs and below. The interviews showed that cost was perceived to be a barrier to participation although it was felt that this was changing. Just 18% of survey respondents mentioned that cost had been a barrier to them in playing sport at some point in their lives, and many of these were people of ‘higher’ socio-economic status. The availability of affordable sporting opportunities was widely recognised by interviewees. It may be factors other than cost *per se*, such as cultural habits and attitudes, which account for the disparity in participation levels between socio-economic groups.

- *Many people believe that sports provision for people with disabilities is inadequate.* Nearly half of respondents (49%) agreed that sports for people with disabilities were not taken seriously in NI. However, many interviewees were simply unaware of what sports provision existed for people with disabilities. Interviewees with disabilities attested to the importance of dedicated disability sports workers and the ongoing reality of access problems at sports venues.

- *Many LGB people face significant obstacles to engaging in sport and leisure.* Testimony from LGB interviewees confirmed existing research regarding the gendered nature of certain team sports and how this can create a culture which is conducive to homophobia. Moreover, LGB interviewees reported that open plan changing rooms and showers were intimidating places, in part because they afforded no privacy and in part because they lent themselves to bullying. Almost one in five (19%) of the survey respondents said they would feel uncomfortable using a changing room at the same time as a gay or lesbian person.

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- *Different opinions on LGB inclusion in sport exist among the wider public.* For instance, 58% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that a gay or lesbian person would be welcome to join and play for most sports clubs in NI while 18% disagreed. Among interviewees, some perceived that the position of LGB people was improving, while others thought that NI continued to be a ‘cold house’ for LGB people. However, few interviewees had encountered openly gay sports people or had even thought much about the subject, while nearly one in four (24%) survey respondents neither agreed nor disagreed regarding the question of whether a gay or lesbian person would be welcome to join and play for most sports clubs in NI.

- *Participation in sport and exercise is extremely difficult for transgender people.* Transgender interviewees described how before, during and after transition, they struggle to find a place in a sports world (changing facilities, teams and competition categories) that is characterised by male-female segregation. Furthermore, the lack of public understanding of transgender people means that any activity in public is fraught with difficulty. The absence of sporting and leisure opportunities can have a detrimental impact on the physical and social wellbeing of transgender people, who are already suffering anxiety and stress as a result of their gender dysphoria. The survey showed that 22% of respondents said they would be uncomfortable sharing a changing room with a transgender person.

- *Ethnic minorities are not widely perceived to face serious sports exclusion, though some respondents felt that the impression that there is racism in certain parts of NI may dissuade ethnic minority participation.* Just 15% of survey respondents thought that a person from an ethnic minority group would not be welcome to join and play for most sports clubs in NI, and 7% did not wish their children’s or grandchildren’s sport team to be coached by someone from an ethnic minority group. There was clear public support (71%) for more funding for cross-ethnic sports projects. Indeed, some ethnic minority interviewees believed strongly in the power of sport to help

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integrate minorities and improve relations with ‘local’ people.

- *Ethnic minority experiences of sport in NI are diverse.* Several interviewees had positive experience of sport, but common too were experiences of racism, both in sporting contexts and elsewhere. Participants from ethnic minorities stated that they found the sectarian divide daunting to navigate, again, both in relation to sport and in other areas. The fact that the sports preferences of people from NI and from other countries could be incompatible, with sports played by migrants unavailable in NI, was highlighted, as was the language barrier.

## **Key issues**

From the findings of our research, a number of key issues regarding exclusion and peacebuilding arise for government, media and society, schools, sports bodies, and those responsible for sports facilities.

- *While recent progress has been made in resolving remaining conflict legacy issues and disputes over cultural expression, politicians must continue to prioritise these matters.* Such a commitment is outlined in OFMDFM’s good relations strategy, *Together: Building a United Community* (OFMDFM, 2013), as well as the Stormont House Agreement, December 2014. Making sports more inclusive requires social changes far beyond the power of sporting organisations, including the removal of murals, flags and other territorial markers, greater sharing in education, housing and social life, and a wider acceptance of differing political identities.
- *The strong public support for sport as a vehicle for peacebuilding, and personal and social development, should continue to inform the direction of government policy and funding in this area.*

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Specifically, the present research should give added impetus to the focus on sport as a peacebuilding tool contained in *Together: Building a United Community*. Targeted funding is required for initiatives which capture the range of socio-economic groups, rectifying the current imbalance in which people of higher occupational status and educational attainment are most likely to have participated in a sport and reconciliation initiative.

- *Action at school level is crucial to the task of breaking down sectarian barriers in sport.*

Integrated and shared education and expanding the range of sports on offer in schools would help to loosen the extant strong ties between school, religious community background and sport, and would buttress the shared community agenda contained in *Together: Building a United Community* and the Stormont House Agreement.

- *The GAA should continue, increase, and effectively communicate its inclusivity measures aimed at encouraging people from all traditions and backgrounds to play and watch Gaelic games.*

Protestants and many Catholics still have reservations about the political associations of the GAA. However, the positive light in which many Protestants view both the GAA's values and sports should encourage the organisation in its outreach efforts to that community. The GAA should also invest in proactively taking steps to rectify the current perceptions, of both Protestants and Catholics, that it is an organisation exclusively for Catholics and nationalists.

- *The community relations work by the IFA through its Football for All campaign, as highlighted by respondents in this study, should be continued and extended.* Most people recognise that considerable improvements have been made in recent years regarding NI international soccer and inclusivity, although some people still retain negative views of the sport. To encourage full participation and involvement by all sections of the community, the *Football for All* initiative should continue with its successful campaign work.



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- *Ulster Rugby should extend the inclusivity of the sport in NI by encouraging greater involvement of players and supporters from Catholic and working-class Protestant communities.*

Communication efforts devoted to targeting these audiences should be developed to build on the current success, wherein the Ulster rugby team is widely seen as a good example of the unifying potential of sport.

- *In relation to the contentious issue of flags and anthems in sport, some form of negotiated, synchronised change is required between sports that can command the support of the political parties and the wider public.* Changes to the use of flags and anthems in soccer, rugby or Gaelic games would be controversial, difficult and indeed unlikely. This suggests that in order for sport to be ‘de-politicised’, change must occur to create a community which promotes mutual respect and understanding, is strengthened by its diversity and where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced. This is stated as a key priority for the NI Executive in *Together: Building a United Community*.

- *The GAA, IFA and Ulster Rugby should enhance their communications to the general public about their contribution to peace-building and reconciliation work in NI.* The sports should capitalise on strong public goodwill towards sport as a way of breaking down barriers and maximise the impact of their co-operation and joint cross-community outreach work through more effective public relations and advertising campaigns.

- *The media must take account of how the extent and content of their sports coverage may contribute to the exclusion of women and girls from sport.* Given the paucity of media coverage of female sports, and the stereotypical way in which female athletes are often portrayed, women and girls are denied female sports role models and encouraged to view sport as a male domain. Females should be encouraged to perceive sport and exercise as an integral part of their lives.

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- *Schools should ensure that they prioritise girls' sport as much as boys'. In addition they should have more shared involvement between girls and boys in sport from an early age, and address the gender expectations (around body image and what activities are and are not appropriate for girls) which may deter girls from involvement sport. While findings show that younger people have more positive views of school sports, schools may nonetheless need to consider the range of sports on offer and whether limited choice may be turning girls off sport.*

- *Schools should be aware of how early sports experiences can determine whether or not people continue to participate later in life. Thus, it is imperative that young people's experiences of sport in school are positive. Sports teachers must be vigilant to ensure that sports do not provide opportunities for bullying – of various kinds – and should organise and coach sports in a way that ensures respect for self and others.*

- *Sports facilities should monitor the gender balance of users. If facilities are, or become, male dominated, there may be a case for creating or extending separate sessions for men and women.*

- *Facilities should consider the feasibility of providing childcare on site or extending and enhancing such provision. This would open up sport and physical exercise opportunities for many people, both men and women.*

- *Negative attitudes towards LGB and transgender people must continually be challenged at all levels of society. Considering their specific exclusion from sport, as identified in this research, LGB and transgender people must be made much more visible in publicly funded sports, health and wellbeing social marketing and advertising campaigns.*

- *Sports provision for people with disabilities should be enhanced to encourage maximum*

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*participation*. This includes sporting facilities and venues, where accessibility for spectators with disabilities continues to be problematic.

- *Targeted communications by sports facilities and organisers – of sporting opportunities and their benefits – are especially important in relation to older people and people with disabilities.* Efforts to engage older people and people with disabilities must take into account that those who have not habitually been active may be particularly unreceptive.

- *In the refurbishment or construction of new facilities, authorities should consider the impact of changing room design on the participation of particular groups.* Communal changing rooms present barriers to many people, in particular, transgender people. Sports facilities with individual changing cubicles should clearly communicate in their publicity the availability of this provision to encourage use and decrease anxiety.

- *Negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities must continually be challenged at all levels of society.* Major sports bodies and local authorities should continue current inclusivity initiatives (e.g. Unite Against Hate) to encourage participation of ethnic minority groups.

In conclusion, our findings identify what people in NI view as the barriers to, and the benefits of, sports participation, and how the sectarian divide, gender, age, socio-economic status, disability, sexuality and ethnicity, can impact on social inclusion through sport. Our data contribute to the development of statistical infrastructure on social exclusion in NI, providing statistical benchmarks that can help chart the evolution of attitudes in respect to sport and social exclusion in the future. The data also assist in the understanding of public perceptions and attitudes in relation to cohesion, sharing and integration in Northern Irish society, and highlight how sport presents both challenges and opportunities in NI's ongoing path away from the violence and division of the 'Troubles'.

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# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Rationale

This Report investigates sport and social exclusion in NI. As we acknowledge and discuss in section 2.2.2, there is considerable debate, and a burgeoning academic literature, with regard to the exact meaning and defining features of ‘sport’. However, in this Report we endorse the definition set out in the Council of Europe’s Sports Charter:

“‘Sport’ means all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels” (Council of Europe, 2001).

This definition is also the one adopted by DCAL and Sport NI in their strategy document *Sport Matters* (DCAL/Sport NI, 2009).

The important role that sport has to play in enhancing social inclusion is now widely acknowledged (Spaaij et al., 2014). In their report into this area, the United Kingdom (UK) Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) concluded that, “the powerful impact which sport can have on social exclusion factors is increasingly recognised by all involved in regeneration and inclusion” (DCMS, 2001, p. 8). Likewise, Liu (2009, p. 325) noted that, “In the UK, sport is increasingly recognized as a means for promoting social inclusion”. Engagement in sport has been shown to produce a range of benefits at the individual, community and societal levels. These include, *inter alia*, better mental and physical health, increased self-esteem, enhanced personal image, lower law and order costs, increased identification with the community, higher levels of tolerance and in general a better overall quality of life (Coalter, 2007). In her analysis of sport as a vehicle for development and peace, Beutler (2008, p. 359) cites further benefits: “It has been proved that the systematic and coherent use of sport can make an important contribution to public health; universal education; gender equality; poverty reduction; prevention of HIV and AIDS and other diseases; environmental sustainability as well as peace-building and conflict resolution.”

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However, sport can also be a vehicle for exclusion. In their text in this area, Collins with Kay (2014) investigated social exclusion and sport in multicultural contexts and cautioned that, “sport is a site of discrimination as much as other areas of life, emanating in poorer access to resources, expertise and power” (p. 132). In many senses, sport can be regarded as a barometer of social harmony/disharmony, so that where sport is characterised by division this often indicates dysfunctional pressure in society. As shown by McGhee and Bairner (2011), in the Northern Ireland context sport has consistently reflected and indeed exacerbated inter-community tensions. It is therefore probable that efforts made to produce cohesion, inclusion and harmony in sport can pay wider dividends. Thus, Elling and Claringbould (2005, p. 498) argued that, “Changes in the facilitation and organization of sport can enhance an inclusive sport practice, which might also foster social inclusion in broader society”.

Social inclusion is a measure of access to and participation in networks of emotional, social and material support (Duhaime et al., 2004; Stanley et al., 2011). In relation to sport, Bailey (2005) argued that access is a necessary condition of inclusion. Thus, if sport is to contribute to social inclusion, it is essential that people have an opportunity to participate and to feel included. The sporting landscape in NI is unique in respect to participation, in that some sports are almost exclusively Catholic (e.g. hurling, Gaelic football), some are mainly Protestant (e.g. cricket, rugby) and others are cross-community (e.g. golf, cycling). Then there is the case of association football, which, although widely played by both communities, also in many senses reflects the extant divisions in NI (Cronin, 1999; Church et al., 2004). To date, very little research has been conducted into the effects of these sporting schisms in relation to social exclusion. The present research helps to redress this situation.

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## 1.2 The policy background

This study is rooted in a number of policy concerns which are current in Northern Ireland. The first of these is to maximise the potential benefit of sport to social and human development. Before reviewing the relevant NI policy documents, it is worth making clear the high level of international support for such a vision. For example, the United Nations has highlighted sport as a potential vehicle for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, emphasising how it can help to harmonise communities, prevent conflicts and facilitate peace-building, contribute to the development of key personal skills and foster important societal attitudes:

“Sport brings individuals and communities together, highlighting commonalities and bridging cultural or ethnic divides (...) provides a forum to learn skills such as discipline, confidence and leadership, and it teaches core principles such as tolerance, co-operation and respect (...) can cut across barriers that divide societies, making it a powerful tool to support conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts (...) Sport programmes can promote social integration and foster tolerance, helping reduce tension and generate dialogue” (United Nations, 2003, p. i).

A similar view of sport’s individual, social and economic benefits has been set out by the European Commission in its document *Developing the European Dimension of Sport*:

“Sport has a strong potential to contribute to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and new jobs through its positive effects on social inclusion, education and training, and public health. It helps limit the rise in social security and health expenditure by improving the health and productivity of the population and by ensuring a higher quality of life through old age. It contributes to social cohesion by breaking down social barriers, and it improves the employability of the population through its impact on education and training. Voluntary activity in sport can contribute to employability, social inclusion as well as higher civic participation, especially among young people” (European Commission, 2011, p. 4).

This document calls on member states to work towards overcoming barriers to sport participation and, in the following excerpt, urges them to recognise the potential for sport to contribute to social inclusion goals, especially among groups that may suffer exclusion from sport such as those with disabilities, women and immigrants:



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“Persons with disabilities have the right to participate on an equal basis with others in sporting activities. The EU and its Member States have signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which includes the obligation to take appropriate measures to make these rights effective. It is important to ensure full implementation of the provisions of this Convention. Women are under-represented in some areas of sport. In accordance with the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015, the Commission will encourage the mainstreaming of gender issues into sport-related activities. Sport enables immigrants and the host society to interact in a positive way, thus furthering integration and inter-cultural dialogue. Sport has been increasingly included in specific programmes for immigrants, but national approaches differ considerably. Sport can also be a vehicle to promote social inclusion of minorities and other vulnerable or disadvantaged groups and contribute towards better understanding among communities, including in post-conflict regions” (European Commission, 2011, p. 4).

In the UK, the Labour government which came to power in 1997 brought social exclusion to the heart of the public policy debate by setting up the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), a body tasked with developing ways to tackle a variety of interconnected social problems in Britain’s most deprived areas. The contribution of sport (and the arts) in combating social exclusion was explored in one of several studies commissioned for the SEU. The then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, recognised the potency of sport for realising social advantage in terms of crime reduction, as well as its concomitant health and education benefits, when he stated:

“It is important that we give this encouragement to sport, not only for its own sake but because, as many people now recognise, it is one of the best anti-crime policies that we could have. It is also as good a health and education policy as virtually any other” (quoted in Central Council of Physical Recreation (CCPR), 2002).

In the NI context, the value of sport and the importance of increasing participation is made forcefully in *Sport Matters* (DCAL/Sport NI, 2009), the key government document with regard to sport. This document, endorsed by the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive and based on extensive consultation, sets out a decade-long development strategy for sport and recreation. This plan is focused on achieving:

“a world class start and lifelong involvement in sport and physical recreation for all people; a world class performance by teams and individuals; and, a sustainable sporting and physical recreational culture that contributes to broader Government objectives” (DCAL/Sport NI, 2009, p. 9).

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In an appendix, *Sport Matters* outlines the importance of sport both as a source of enjoyment for the individual and as a way of ‘improving society’. It is argued that this can be achieved through various means.

The first way in which sport can reap these benefits is by enhancing ‘community cohesion’. This is supported by research. There is increasing evidence of the value of sport in contributing to social cohesion (Spaaij, 2009a), and so sport and physical recreation can make a significant contribution to achieving the vision of a ‘Shared Future’ in NI (DCAL/Sport NI, 2009). Spaaij (2009b, p. 1132) illustrates how local sport clubs can become, “vital community hubs fostering social cohesion, local and regional identities and a shared focus and outlet”. In similar vein, sports volunteering is important for community development, as well as developing in volunteers transferable people skills (Kay and Bradbury, 2009).

Second, is public health. Research reviews confirm *Sport Matters*’ assertion that physical activity can produce a wide range of benefits, including contributing to reductions in, inter alia, incidences of obesity, cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, colon cancer, osteoporosis, anxiety and stress (e.g. Vogel et al., 2009; Bailey et al., 2010; Lubans et al., 2010; O’Donovan et al., 2010; Garber et al., 2011). In his analysis of this area Blair (2009, p. 1) concluded: “There is now overwhelming evidence that regular physical activity has important and wide-ranging health benefits”. For example, in a major systematic review of research studies with school-aged children and young people, Janssen and LeBlanc (2010) found physical activity to be associated with numerous health benefits, and the greater the amount of physical activity engaged in the larger the benefit. On the basis of their findings, they recommend that young people between the ages of 5-17 years should exercise for an average of 60 minutes per day, although some health benefits can be achieved from 30 minutes of exercise per day. However, only 35 per cent of adults (40 per cent male; 31 per cent

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female) in NI meet the UK Chief Medical Officer's similar exercise target of thirty minutes, five times a week (Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2012), while the cost of inactivity to health services in NI is in the hundreds of millions of pounds (Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, 2010).

Other benefits outlined by *Sport Matters* are: increasing educational attainment and re-engaging marginalised young people; contributing to the economy through sports spending, 'activity tourism' and volunteering; and, boosting Northern Ireland's image abroad, especially following several decades of conflict. In outlining its targets for increasing participation rates among the public, *Sport Matters* mentions four groups that are known to have lower participation rates: women and girls, people from lower socio-economic categories, the disabled and older people. Overall, *Sport Matters* makes clear the growing recognition in government with respect to both the potential of sport to help achieve the interconnected goals of social inclusion, personal wellbeing and a more shared society, and the importance of overcoming the barriers to sports participation that hinder the realisation of this potential.

Finally in this section, it is worth highlighting the clear endorsement by government of sport's capacity to contribute to peace-building and community development given in the community relations strategy produced by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), *Together: Building a United Community*, in May 2013 (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, 2013). The strategy includes piloting cross-community sporting activities for 11-16 year-olds in contested, 'interface' areas. On the power of sport, the document comments:

"We recognise that sport is a powerful tool in bringing people together. We know that sport can play a central role in breaking down divisions in society and can provide a mechanism to encourage sharing, learning, and friendship; as well as, healthy competition across all parts of our society" (p. 37).

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## 1.3 Research objectives

The objectives of this project were as follows:

- To understand the extent, distribution and causes of social exclusion in NI society, particularly in the sporting context.
- To chart current practice in relation to exclusion/inclusion in sport in NI.
- To assist in the understanding of public perceptions and attitudes in respect of cohesion, sharing and integration in NI.
- To contribute to the development of the statistical infrastructure on social exclusion in NI and provide specific statistical indicators on sport and social exclusion.
- To facilitate and inform wider public debate on the issues of sport and social exclusion in NI.
- To identify key issues to shape future policy development.

A three-pronged approach was taken to meeting these objectives. Firstly, a Literature Review of relevant international academic and ‘grey’ literature in relation to social inclusion/exclusion and sport was conducted, including a survey of sports-based peace and social inclusion projects in NI. Secondly, qualitative research was conducted with a representative sample (n=104) of members of the public across NI. This involved using in-depth semi-structured interviews to gauge respondents’ views regarding their perceptions and experiences of inclusion/exclusion in sport. With the assistance of gatekeeper organisations, this sample included LGB people, transgender individuals,

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people with disabilities, and members of minority ethnic groups. A Qualitative Report, analysing and synthesising findings, was produced. Thirdly, quantitative research was also conducted through the inclusion of a SESNI survey module in the 2013 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (n = 1210). The questions were informed by the Literature Review and Qualitative Report, and drawn up in consultation with NILT staff and the project Steering Group. A Quantitative Report, comprising statistical analysis and evaluation, was produced.

This Report is divided into three sections according to each of these three phases. Detailed methodological information is given at the start of each section. A concluding chapter summarises and synthesises the findings and identifies key issues to shape future policy.

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## 2 Literature review

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## 2.1 Introduction

It is impossible to present a complete exposition of the voluminous literature on sport, social exclusion and Northern Ireland. However, as a starting point to the research, a synopsis of the central themes pertaining to each area will be presented. Firstly, the meaning and significance of the two core focuses of the project, social exclusion and sport, will be reviewed. The relationship between sport and social exclusion, and their relevance to the NI context in particular, and to sport and to peacebuilding in divided societies more generally, will then be discussed. Secondly, the issue of sports exclusion in NI is examined. This includes an analysis of the political and sporting context, an evaluation of the impact of the political/community divide on sport, and a discussion of those groups of people who experience exclusion. Thirdly, the large number of projects that use sport to advance social exclusion and peacebuilding in NI are reviewed.

Our literature review strategy included a search of the following databases: Web of Science, PsycINFO, Pubmed, Physical Education Index, supplemented with searches of Google Scholar, Google Books, LexisNexis, UU Library Catalogue, and searches of key journals and reference lists of identified papers. Using the key words (detailed below) we selected relevant articles, books, journals and reports for review. In our review search strategy we used the following Primary Keywords: ‘social exclusion’, or ‘exclusion’, or ‘social inclusion’, or ‘inclusion’, or ‘barriers’, or ‘involvement’, or ‘participation’, or ‘peace-building’, or ‘reconciliation’ or ‘development’ together with ‘sport’, or ‘physical activity’, or ‘exercise’. To identify key groups in our search along with the Primary Keywords we used the following Secondary Keywords: ‘socio-economic status’ or ‘low income’, ‘women’ or ‘girls’ or ‘females’, ‘older people’ or ‘elderly’, ‘disability’ or ‘disabled people’ or ‘people with disabilities’, ‘ethnic minorities’ or ‘ethnicity’ or ‘migrant communities’, ‘religion’ or ‘Protestant’ or ‘Catholic’, ‘lesbian’ or ‘gay’ or ‘bisexual’ or ‘transgender’ or

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‘sexuality’. The inclusion criteria employed in our review were as follows: only English language material was reviewed; material published up until 2014 was included; and there were no sample restrictions.



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## 2.2 Social exclusion and sport

### 2.2.1 Social exclusion

In recent decades, social exclusion has become a fashionable term, much-discussed in academic and policy circles in Europe and around the world (Steinert, 2007). However, there is disagreement about what exactly constitutes social exclusion (Lee and Murie, 1999; Burchardt et al., 2002a; Spaaij et al., 2014). As summarised by Hargie et al. (2011a, p. 874), “Social exclusion is a complex concept, which has provoked considerable expatiation, with little emergent consensus about the exact meaning of the term”. Similarly, Teague and Wilson (1995, p. 1) commented that: “Social exclusion is a term that has gate-crashed the debate about the direction of social policy without paying the entrance fee of a definition”. It is often used, *de facto*, as a synonym for poverty. Indeed, as demonstrated by Atkinson and Marlier, (2010, p. 7), “The analysis of social exclusion emerged out of a long-standing concern with the measurement of poverty”. But exclusion is closely related to a variety of other terms such as ‘inequality’, ‘underclass’, ‘marginalisation’, ‘multiple deprivation’ and ‘social closure’, and is also defined by antonyms like ‘social inclusion’, ‘social capital’, ‘social cohesion’ and ‘citizenship’.

The modern use of the term is traced to debates in 1970s France about those who were administratively excluded by the state from social protection, specifically, the book ‘*Les Exclús*’ (‘The Excluded’) by Secretary of State for Social Action, René Lenoir (1974). The term continued to evolve, from the social categories unprotected under social insurance in the early 1970s, to the people that economic growth forgot (Silver, 1994) in the late 1970s. They were identified as “the disabled people, the lone parents, the uninsured unemployed (especially young adults), the suicidal people, the delinquents, multi-problem households, marginal, asocial and other ‘misfits’” (Silver,

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1994, p. 532). The concept has been used extensively at European Union (EU) level and by the United Nations Development Programme, which has understood social exclusion as a lack of enforceable civil and social rights – for example, to health care, basic education and material well-being (Burchardt et al., 2002a). As mentioned earlier, New Labour and the SEU brought social exclusion discourse to the forefront of public policy debate in the UK.

### *Defining social exclusion*

Differences pertaining to the precise meaning of social exclusion occur both within and between nation states. However, in examining the European perspective on the concept, Silver and Miller (2003) identified five main defining features of social exclusion, as being:

1. *active* - exclusion is something that is caused by people or processes
2. *dynamic* - it spans a continuum from complete exclusion at one end to total integration at the other
3. *relative* - it varies across settings
4. *relational* - it involves psychosocial dimensions including, inter alia, lack of participation, isolation, rejection, and humiliation
5. *multidimensional* - it encompasses both individual and collective dimensions.

Silver (1994) analysed the multifarious meanings of social exclusion, and mapped these to conflicting political ideologies and social science paradigms. She identified three key paradigms within which exclusion is conceptualised:

- **Monopoly.** In this conflict paradigm, social order is conceptualised as being coercive and imposed via hierarchical structures involving status, class and political power. Thus, powerful groups control resources and protect these by restricting access to them and constructing barriers to exclude others. This paradigm is regarded as being reflective of the social democratic

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political structures prevalent in Western Europe, in which the State maintains power but attempts to balance this by providing social protection to its citizens.

- Specialisation. Here, exclusion is regarded as resulting from social differentiation and the economic division of labour. Exclusion is portrayed as variegated, so that the same person may be excluded in some spheres but not in others. In addition, individuals can voluntarily exclude themselves, be excluded because of market failures, contractual relationships and the nature of interests between groups, or as a result of discrimination. This paradigm prevails in the USA, with a linkage being made between exclusion and discrimination.
- Solidarity. Emanating from work in the fields of ethnography, sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies, in this paradigm exclusion is regarded as being caused by a weakening of the bonds (individual, institutional and economic) that usually connect the individual to society. Exclusion can be damaging for the individual in terms of the failure of material and symbolic exchange with society. It can also threaten society as a whole owing to the weakening of the social fabric and the sense of 'order', and a possible breakdown of collective values. This model is most applicable to France, where the debate about social exclusion originated.

The definition given by Adato et al. (2006, p. 229) cuts across these categories: "Exclusion has both economic and social dimensions. The economic dimension refers to exclusion from the opportunities to earn income, the labour market and access to assets. The social dimension refers to exclusion from decision making, social services and community and family support". A similar perspective was presented by Klasen (2002), who argued that social exclusion concerns the extent to which individuals have access to a number of basic indicators, such as being well-fed, housed, healthy, and able to participate in community and public life. Likewise, Bossert et al. (2007, p. 777) viewed social exclusion "as being in a state of deprivation over time". Hammer (2003) further

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argued that the notion of social exclusion was developed by politicians to soften the negative connotations of ‘poverty’ and frame the discussion in wider terms other than purely financial income.

However, across the many definitions of social exclusion in the literature, there is agreement that it is a broader term than poverty, encompassing dimensions of wellbeing beyond the economic. The OFMDFM (2012) describes social exclusion as concerned “with poverty and joblessness – but it is more than that. It is about being cut off from the social and economic life of our community”. The definition proffered by Burchardt et al. (2002b, p. 30) is brief and broad: “An individual is socially excluded if he or she does not participate in key activities of the society in which he or she lives”. The activities which Burchardt and colleagues regard as ‘key’ are consumption (purchasing power), production (employment), political engagement (partaking in local or national decision-making) and social interaction (relationships with friends, family and community). Similarly, Commins (1993) suggests that social inclusion involves belonging to four of society’s systems: welfare, democracy, the labour market, and family and community.

### *Causes of social exclusion*

While social exclusion is more than poverty, the latter is still central to the cause and manifestation of the former (Aldridge et al., 2012). Social exclusion used to be, and still is to some extent, synonymous with poverty (Room, 1995; Atkinson, 1998; Dowling, 1999; Lee and Murie, 1999; Hills, 2002). This is perhaps not surprising, since it is a fact that the poor have more limited opportunities to achieve their individual and social goals (Haataja, 1999; Stanley et al., 2011). Collins with Kay (2014, p. 31) insist that, despite the multi-dimensionality of social exclusion, poverty remains the ‘core’ due to its far-reaching impact on the person. There is evidence that there are dynamic cross-effects between poverty and social exclusion indicating that they are mutually reinforcing (Devicienti and Poggi, 2011), although there is also research to suggest that the path

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between poverty and exclusion may go through educational failure (Bäckman and Nilsson, 2010).

Gallie et al. (2003) emphasise unemployment as the key driver for social exclusion. In their analysis of unemployment, poverty and social isolation across European countries, they identified “an impressive array of evidence from diverse national cross-sectional studies of the inter-relationships between unemployment and financial deprivation on the one hand and unemployment and social isolation on the other” (p. 3). Unemployment clearly fuels other aspects of social exclusion, such as homelessness, physical and mental ill-health, and drug misuse. Martin (1998, p. 43) argues that, “Full employment performs an integrative and social harmonising role: it promotes social inclusion, cohesion, citizenship and a sense of participation in the wider community”.

Another important factor here is what has been termed ‘new poverty’. This is a relatively recent phenomenon, which has had potentially severe consequences for worsening the social exclusion of working-class communities (Webster et al., 2004; Shu-Jung, 2009). The banking crisis and the economic financial downturn have led to recession and concomitant government cutbacks in public sector jobs and in welfare benefits. In addition, the phenomenon of globalisation has led to the outsourcing of jobs. All of this has had a severe impact upon the poorer members of society. This has been exacerbated by the de-industrialisation of regions which formerly offered secure employment for young people. Many jobs that were previously filled by school-leavers disappeared, to be replaced by short-term, low-status training schemes, which usually do not lead to long-term employment (Fergusson et al., 2000; Grice, 2012). Furthermore, access to higher education is often not a feasible option for young people from poor backgrounds (Jones, 2005; Osborne et al., 2006).

However, some researchers note that although unemployment may cause social exclusion, employment does not necessarily ensure social inclusion (Atkinson, 1998). The results of the UK

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Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey suggested that paid work did not necessarily relieve other aspects of social exclusion, such as exclusion from social relations (Pantazis et al., 2006). Bailey (2006) presents the case for the ‘in-work poor and excluded’, noting that the impact of employment on poverty is of much more significance than on exclusion. This problem is escalating. A report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on poverty in Northern Ireland (New Policy Institute, 2014) found that household incomes, poverty rates and the labour market had all worsened in the previous five years and at a greater rate than Great Britain. The proportion of unemployed working-age people in NI almost doubled between 2007/08 and 2012/13 to 5.8 per cent. The proportion of those working part-time and wanting full-time work increased from 1.7 per cent (the same level as Great Britain) to 4.4 per cent (compared with 3.5 per cent in Great Britain). The number of households in which the main income earner was working part-time rose by 30 per cent in the same period. Recent years have witnessed a growth in the phenomenon of ‘zero-hours contracts’, which refer to an employment contract in which the employee has to be available for work when required, is given no guarantee of employment, and is paid only for the hours worked. In their review of the area, Pyper and McGuiness (2013) present findings to suggest that over 3 per cent of workers in the UK may now be on these contracts. As reported by the Office for National Statistics in November 2012, the economic downturn has seen a sharp growth in the phenomenon of ‘underemployment’ – those who are in work but are working fewer hours than they would like. Since 2008, the number of underemployed in the UK has risen by just under one million to three million, one-tenth of the workforce (British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 2012a).

Nevertheless, Long et al. (2002) point out that inclusion must mean more than the mere ability to be a consumer, and in any case, some groups, such as the old or disabled, are not able to be economically active, thus ruling out work as a means to their inclusion. Furthermore, social exclusion also refers to the impact of discrimination and prejudice. In contrast to poverty, social exclusion “incorporates non-material states and processes of disadvantage, including those created

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through others' opinions" (Tunstall, 2011, p. 3). Thus, the psychological perspective on social exclusion focuses upon the effects of being rejected by or isolated from others (Abrams et al., 2005). What social exclusion does share with poverty is its contested nature (Kelly, 2011). Both are inevitably political, and thus subject to ideological interpretation (Collins with Kay, 2014). Burchardt et al. (2002a) identify three schools of thought in the literature in relation to causes of social exclusion. One puts the responsibility on individuals' behaviour and moral values, a second blames the role of institutions and systems, from the welfare state to late capitalism and globalisation, and a third concentrates on discrimination and lack of enforced rights. Similarly, Levitas (1998; 2006) proposed that three distinct discourses around social exclusion have emerged, each underpinned by differing philosophical assumptions about the individual and the state:

1. RED (redistribution discourse) emphasises poverty as the prime cause and proposes that the solution lies in a radical redistribution of power and resources.
2. MUD (moral underclass discourse) links exclusion to the moral inadequacy of the excluded, places the responsibility on the poor themselves for their poverty and opposes welfare benefits, arguing that these encourage dependency on the state.
3. SID (social inclusion discourse) links exclusion/inclusion to labour market attachment, focuses on unemployment and the lack of paid work, and ignores other aspects of exclusion.

There is a further debate about whether social exclusion is a process, a condition that results from a process, or even both. This problem may stem in part from the inherent ambiguity of the word 'exclusion' – it can mean both the act of excluding, or the state of being excluded. Thus arises conceptual confusion about what are the symptoms or indicators of social exclusion, and what are causes. The SEU described social exclusion as "a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown" (SEU, 1997, p. 1). Long et al. (2002) point out that this understanding regards these social ills as causes of

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social exclusion when in fact they are symptoms; treating the symptoms i.e. reducing the incidence of these indicators, does not necessarily ensure social inclusion. The definition also fails to specify what it is that “happens” (Levitas, 2006, p. 129). Long et al. prefer the following definition, from the EU, as it draws attention to the processes involved in social exclusion:

“Social exclusion refers to the multiple and changing factors resulting in people being excluded from the normal exchanges, practices and rights of modern society. Poverty is one of the most obvious factors, but social exclusion also refers to inadequate rights in housing, education, health and access to services. It affects individuals and groups, particularly in urban and rural areas, who are in some way subject to discrimination or segregation; and it emphasises weaknesses in the social infrastructure and the risk of allowing a two-tier society to become established by default” (Commission of the European Communities, 1993, p. 1).

The dynamic character of social exclusion was also emphasised by Berghman (1995). He proposed that, given the fact that social exclusion can connote both a condition and a process, two concepts are needed – deprivation to denote the outcome and social exclusion to denote the process.

### *Measuring social exclusion*

The importance of definitional and conceptual debates, of course, lies in the fact that they will determine how social exclusion is recognised, measured and addressed. Webster et al. (2004, p. 3) comment: “Its vagueness and elasticity has been recognised as a major problem in applying the concept in social scientific research”. As per the SEU definition above, a range of social ills are associated with social exclusion, and are often listed as being indicators. However, Burchardt et al. (2002b) stress that these phenomena are in fact *risk factors* rather than indicators, since an individual may still participate in employment, consumption, political engagement and social life – perhaps against the odds – despite being, say, from an ethnic minority, a deprived area, a broken family, and so on. Thus, as was noted above, reducing the levels of unemployment or family breakdown does not necessarily ensure inclusion. Levitas (2006, p. 129) reviews the various lists of indicators that have been drawn up for use in surveys at EU and national level, and points out that



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the difficulties with them are legion, including:

“the distinction between measures, indicators and risk factors; the quality of individual indicators; their individual relevance; their relative importance or priority; the danger of stigmatising certain groups in defining their behaviour or situation as socially excluded; and the implied causal processes involved in choosing indicators”.

A good example of a comprehensive measure is the 1999 UK Poverty and Social Exclusion survey which included the following indicators: lack of paid work, living in a jobless household, exclusion from services, non-participation in social activities, social isolation, poor social support, and civic disengagement (see Levitas, 2006). Many of these states are inter-connected and self-sustaining. For example, a lack of money can put a strain on relationships; a period of unemployment tends to reduce the likelihood of finding employment, and so on (Hargie et al., 2011a). In this way, social exclusion is a vicious circle, with indicators of social exclusion being both symptoms and causes.

A final issue is the question of voluntary exclusion. Does someone who chooses to withdraw from society count as being socially excluded? On this, two points can be made. Firstly, voluntary non-participation is highly unlikely in practice. As Burchardt et al. (2002b) point out, few would choose to have a below-average income, to be long term sick or without the support of friends and family. Also, while it is quite common for individuals to be politically disengaged, this can still be classed as a problem that needs to be addressed to the extent that it undermines the democratic legitimacy of the state. Secondly, voluntary non-participation is not always what it seems. The degree to which an action is voluntary depends on the quality of the choices on offer. If an individual or group chooses to opt out of participation in society after experiencing discrimination or hostility, this cannot be regarded as voluntary exclusion (Barry, 2002). While the case of someone not wanting to avail of services, social or shopping opportunities might seem like a clear case of voluntary exclusion, not to be classed as social exclusion, Levitas (2006, p. 150) points out that “people learn to be poor”, they learn not to want what they cannot afford and so their choices in this regard cannot

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be viewed as entirely voluntary.

To summarise, despite its ubiquity in academic and policy debate in recent years, social exclusion is an elusive idea, difficult to define and measure. However, its power and perhaps its popularity, reside in two aspects. Firstly, social exclusion implies that someone or something is doing the excluding, thus prioritising structural or systemic causes of deprivation over individual causes, and so avoiding the condemnation of people for their poverty. Secondly, social exclusion draws attention to the social consequences of poverty. Lacking financial resources does not merely impact on one's bank account and purchasing power, but on one's health, mobility, social connectedness and ability to participate in civic life.

### 2.2.2 Sport<sup>1</sup>

The second focus of this project is sport. Like many ideas and activities, sport, at first glance, appears easy to define and universally understood, yet on closer inspection, its essence and parameters become less clear. Probing the nature of sport entails answering two questions. Firstly, what activities count as sport? Secondly, what is the meaning of sport? (i.e. the roles it plays in people's lives, both individually and collectively).

Although most people probably have a similar image of what a sport is – individuals or teams competing at a physical activity – it takes little effort to think of games/activities which defy easy classification. Some games like snooker or chess, have competitive and skill elements but lack the physical and social dimensions usually associated with sport. Figure skating and synchronised

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<sup>1</sup> In the UK, the word 'sport' is usually used to refer to one or some or all sporting activities, while in the USA, 'sports' is preferred as the plural form. However, in the non-USA academic literature, 'sports' is often used as it captures the fact that it refers to a range of different activities. Given that both terms are used to refer to the same activity, in this review the terms 'sport' and 'sports' are used interchangeably.

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swimming are recognised Olympic sports yet are arguably more akin to dance, having important artistic dimensions which are judged subjectively. Then there is the issue of so-called ‘country sports’ or ‘blood sports’ such as angling, shooting, fox-hunting or bull-fighting. These examples illustrate the fact that there is no universally accepted definition of sport, no internationally recognised roster of *bona fide* sports and no agreed criteria that must be met by an activity in order to count as sport. Indeed, Sport England (2015) point out on their website that, “The sports councils do not decide what is and what is not a sport. There are many different opinions as to what constitutes a sporting activity and the sports councils do not have their own definition of sport.” In fact, some academics have argued that philosophically a definition of sport may be neither necessary nor desirable (McAfee, 2004). However, there are various classifications of sport on which we can focus our discussion.

In the USA, Woods (2011, p. 7) asserts that sport, “is typically defined as institutionalized competitive activity that involves physical skill and specialized facilities or equipment and is conducted according to an accepted set of rules to determine a winner”. He also recognises that the definition of sport will vary across cultures, so for example in a culture that prioritises cooperative rather than competitive goals there would be less emphasis on competition and winning in any definition. Suits (2007) distinguishes between games and sports and argues that for a game to be a sport it must meet four requirements:

1. it must be a game of skill
2. the skill involved must be physical
3. the game should have a wide following, in terms of numbers who participate
4. it should have a level of stability, in terms not only of longevity but of related roles and institutions such as a governing body, a training or coaching structure, research and development initiatives, and archives of its history.

Other features of sport have been identified by SportAccord, the umbrella organisation for

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international sports federations and organisers of international sporting events. In assessing membership applications, SportAccord (2012) uses the following criteria, namely that the sport should:

- include an element of competition
- not rely on any element of ‘luck’ specifically integrated into the sport
- not pose an undue risk to the health and safety of its participants
- not be harmful to any living creature
- not rely on equipment that is provided by a single supplier.

This, then, rules out for example blood sports or games of chance. The extremely diverse properties of sports are highlighted in SportAccord’s (2012) five categories of members: sports which are primarily physical, primarily mind, primarily motorised, primarily coordination, and primarily animal-supported. SportAccord notes that many sports fall under more than one category due to the different skills involved. Overall, SportAccord appears to view classifying sport as an inexact science, coming to its decisions through deliberations over how the activity fits with general guidelines.

As mentioned in Section 1.1, the EU offers a single-sentence definition of sport, set out in the Council of Europe’s Sports Charter: “‘Sport’ means all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels” (Council of Europe, 2001). This is also the definition used in DCAL/Sport NI’s (2009) strategy document *Sport Matters*. Given its breadth, simplicity, inclusiveness and wide usage, this definition is the one adopted in this project.

Nevertheless, questions remain. To begin with, *Sport Matters* (p. 4) offers two other closely related

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definitions pertaining to forms of physical exertion. ‘Physical recreation’ is: “Based on the needs of the individual, less goal orientated, less constrained by rules and more spontaneous than sport. May also be considered as sport done in an informal setting by an individual or on a non-competitive basis”. This stands in contrast to ‘physical activity’ which: “Involves any bodily movement produced by contraction of the skeletal muscle that subsequently increases energy expenditure. Such activity may not necessarily be recognised as sport or physical recreation”.

Thus, the boundaries of ‘sport’, ‘physical recreation’ and ‘physical activity’ are unclear. For example, in their study into the effects of sport on the likelihood of stroke, Grau, et al. (2009, p. 426) defined sport as “any leisure-time motor activity that had its aim in itself or was performed for no other purpose than to improve or maintain physical fitness”. In this way, they included activities such as walking, but excluded other forms of physical activity such as gardening. Moreover, some activities might be classed as a sport in some contexts and not others; certain of the most popular kinds of exercise, like walking, cycling and swimming, look more or less ‘sport-like’, depending on the circumstances under which they occur. Significantly for the present study, the most popular forms of sport in terms of participation are not necessarily the most socially salient. For example, in NI, soccer and Gaelic games rank 6<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> respectively in terms of numbers of people participating in these sports (Mallon, 2014), yet these activities attract high levels of public interest, passion, and division.

Another distinction can be made between the constitutive social features of the *practice* of sport as involving elements of cooperation, association and competition, and the contextual factors inherent in the *institution* of sport, which may encompass the involvement of commercial, educational and political bodies (Kew, 1997). Recognising the multi-faceted nature of sport is critical to understanding its impact on the individual and society, and how people perceive them. What is clear is that, in sport, we are dealing with a huge number of diverse activities, each with a variety of

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properties and giving participants very different experiences, as summarised by Coalter et al. (2000, p. 8):

“...‘sport’ is a collective noun which refers to a wide range of processes, social relationships and presumed physical, psychological and sociological outcomes. For example, there are individual, partner and team sports; contact and non-contact sports; motor driven or perceptually dominated sports and those which place different emphases on strategy, chance and physical skills. Further, the nature and context of participation can range from the competitive, via an emphasis on self-development, to purely recreational activity”.

The second question – what is the meaning of sport? – has given rise to an ever-growing international field of study examining the cultural, psychological and sociological dimensions of sport. Two (related) strands within this vast literature are of relevance to the present research. The first explores the connections between sport and social exclusion. The second examines the relationships between sport, international development and peace-building. We will look at each in turn.

### **2.2.3 The relationships between sport and social exclusion**

Sport can be said to be related to social exclusion in three ways. Firstly, exclusion from sport *is* social exclusion. If social exclusion is understood as the inability to take part fully in all aspects of society, sport (and other aspects of culture) must be included in this, and so social exclusion entails a reduced capacity to participate in sport (Collins with Kay, 2014). Secondly, social exclusion hinders the ability of individuals to participate in sport. The impact of social exclusion on access to sport and leisure is the major theme of Collins with Kay (2014) which outlines three categories of constraints on people playing sport. The first is ‘structural’ factors. This includes inadequate facilities/environment, lack of transport and poor community capacity. The second is ‘mediating’ factors which refer to societal attitudes that might restrict sport for certain groups and the

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attitudes/actions of leisure managers and policy makers. The third is ‘personal’ factors – a lack of money and time, poor confidence and a negative body-image. Each of these constraints is relevant to a greater or lesser degree for groups at risk of social exclusion: elderly, women, youth, disabled, ethnic minorities. Ultimately, however, the greatest constraint is poverty:

“Poverty affects access to leisure: apart from a few happy hermits or those who have opted out of mainstream society, there can be virtually no one who is poor and not excluded from leisure and culture, for much of leisure is now commodified and has to be paid for directly, or indirectly through transport, parking fees or food and drink” (Collins with Kay, 2014, p. 35).

Below, these barriers are set in a Northern Ireland context.

The third relationship – the potential of sport to help combat social exclusion/promote social inclusion – requires greatest exploration. As is clear from the policy review in section 1.2, the idea that sport has a positive social impact has become part of received wisdom among politicians and policy makers, and, indeed, sports governing bodies and the wider public, not least in NI. A plethora of benefits are commonly attributed to sport. As summarised by Coalter (2007, p. 19-20), these include:

- Physical fitness and improved health.
- Improved mental health and psychological wellbeing, leading to the reduction of anxiety and stress.
- Positive personality development via improved self-concept, physical and global self-esteem/confidence, self-confidence and increased locus of control.
- Social psychological benefits such as empathy, integrity, tolerance, cooperation, trustworthiness and the development of social skills.

As Coalter notes, arguments for the social benefits of sport are based on the presumption that these individual impacts will have a broader influence through changed behaviour and attitudes, leading

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to stronger community identity, social coherence and integration - i.e. 'social capital'.

Much of the literature on sport and exclusion focuses on sport's potential as an agent of social capital (Bailey, 2005; Coalter, 2007; Perks, 2007; Nicholson and Hoye, 2008a). In the most cited conception, social capital refers to the trust and reciprocity of social networks. Where such connections are high, crime, suicide, mental illness, teen pregnancy, economic deprivation and other social ills tend to be low (Putnam, 2000). Bailey (2005, p. 76) comments: "Since sport participation provides a focus for social activity, an opportunity to make friends, develop networks and reduce social isolation, it seems well placed to support the development of social capital". Bailey notes four related dimensions of social inclusion/exclusion and argues that sporting activities can impact upon all four dimensions:

- *spatial* – the proximity and closing of social and economic distances
- *relational* – a sense of belonging and acceptance
- *functional* – the enhancement of knowledge, skills and understanding
- *power* – a change in the locus of control

Thus sport can bring together individuals from differing backgrounds in a shared interest in activities that are inherently valuable (spatial), foster a sense of belonging – e.g. to a club or a team (relational), provide maximum opportunity for the development of valued skills and competencies (functional), and grow 'community capital', by increasing community cohesion and extending social networks (power).

However, as Nicholson and Hoye (2008b, p. 12) point out, "the relationship between sport and social capital has an equal chance of being either positive or negative". Indeed Putnam (2000) argued that social capital has a 'dark side' in that the bonds of organisations and networks can also exclude outsiders from the privileges enjoyed by insiders. Coalter (2007) raises a series of problems



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with the idea that sports clubs build social capital, such as: membership of sports clubs is often unstable, thus weakening their ability to build social capital; ‘bonding capital’ within sports clubs can lead to segregation and exclusionary behaviours, such as those within ethnically-exclusive clubs; some surveys find little social trust within sports clubs; sports clubs tend to be oriented around achieving competitive success and may not see themselves as having a community development role; and, the possibility of self-selection and circularity i.e. those who join sports clubs may be those who already possess social capital. Indeed, Lake’s (2013) recent ethnographic study of ‘established-outsider’ relationships within a suburban London tennis club provides vivid evidence of the exclusivist and impenetrable culture that can exist within sports clubs.

It must be remembered that competitive sport, by definition, has an exclusionary dimension in that it pits groups of people against one another, rewards winners and penalises losers, and enforces conformity to rules and behaviours (Donnelly and Coakley, 2002; Collins with Kay, 2014). For example, in an assessment of the effectiveness of the first Homeless World Cup in 2003 in combating social exclusion, Magee and Jeanes (2013) found that the competitive nature of the tournament led to dichotomous experiences for participants; thus, the authors comment, “sport can potentially raise the confidence and self-esteem of ‘at risk’ individuals who are good at it, for those who are not it serves to act as a further arena for failure” (p.15). Furthermore, some researchers would argue that promoting sport as a means of tackling social exclusion can be regarded as a form of ‘social control’, wherein the powerful provide activities which, through diversion or the inculcation of ‘civilised’ values, help to keep the lower classes in their place (e.g. Donnelly, 2011).

Meanwhile, there is the problem of empirical support for the tangible benefits of sport (see Donnelly and Coakley, 2002; Coalter, 2007; Kelly, 2011). Bailey (2005) finds strong evidence that sport is beneficial for physical and mental health, but much less credible empirical data to substantiate the claims that physical activity aids cognitive and academic development, and leads to

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crime reduction and a decline in truancy. There have been numerous criticisms of what has been termed ‘sport evangelism’. For example, Coalter in numerous publications has outlined how evidence for many of the social benefits attributed to sport is weak (e.g. Coalter, 2007), in large part due to the difficulty of proving a causal connection between sports participation and changed attitudes or behaviour. In response to the need for further research, Coalter, in conjunction with Sport England, carries out the Value of Sport Monitor (Sport England, 2012), an on-going review of published studies on the social impact of sport which is updated online periodically. Topics included are: crime reduction and community safety, economic impact and regeneration of local communities, education and lifelong learning, the effects of participation in youth on lifelong participation, physical fitness and health, psychological health and wellbeing, and social capacity and cohesion. Reviews of studies in most of these areas indicate the need for further, especially longitudinal, research, although many studies are covered which do tentatively point to a positive contribution of sport in these domains. Unsurprisingly, the clearest evidence is in support of the importance of sport to physical health.

A similar endeavour is the Culture and Sport Evidence (CASE) programme led by DCMS which was established to provide evidence for sport and culture policy-making. CASE’s findings regarding the benefits of sport are very positive. Systematic reviews conducted for CASE show that young people’s participation in organised sport improves their numeracy scores, on average, by 8 per cent compared to non-participants. The participation of underachieving young people (both primary and secondary school age) in extra-curricular learning activities involving sport was found to increase their numeracy skills, on average, by 29 per cent above that of non-participants, and their transferable skills by 12-16 per cent. Engagement in sport was also found to have a measurable impact on ‘subjective wellbeing’ and considerably reduces an individual’s lifetime healthcare costs (CASE, 2012).

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It is important to stress that critical analysts such as Coalter and Bailey do not argue against the efficacy of sport. Rather, they highlight, firstly, the need for more and better research, and secondly, that if benefits do accrue from sport, they will depend on a range of variables such as the individuals involved, the intensity of participation and other circumstantial factors. Despite the positive findings of the CASE review on sport and educational attainment, it nonetheless acknowledges the small number of available studies, while also calling for “better theoretical thinking in the design of interventions and their evaluation and a greater focus on understanding the mechanisms (processes) that make an intervention work and in what context” (CASE, 2012). Thus, apart from benefits to personal health (and even this claim must be qualified due to the fact that sport can cause physical injury), we must conclude that sport is not intrinsically ‘good’ or ‘bad’, but its personal and social impact is determined by the conditions under which it takes place. The question then is, not whether sport *per se* can combat social exclusion, but what are the policies, values and organisational elements that might enable sport to achieve social inclusion goals?

Donnelly and Coakley (2002) address this, arguing that inclusive sports/physical activity programmes should have a number of features including: affordability; appropriate scheduling of activities; strong policies on violence, harassment and equity; skilled and sensitive leadership; and, a role for participants in decision making. They posit that positive transitions from childhood to adolescence to adulthood are most likely when young people live in a context in which they are (1) physically safe; (2) personally valued; (3) socially connected; (4) morally and economically supported; (5) personally and politically empowered; and, (6) hopeful about the future. These are therefore principles to which sport and recreation programmes should aspire. In an assessment of two UK sporting/physical activity programmes for disadvantaged young people, Sandford et al. (2008), highlighted the importance of giving a role to participants in decision-making and positive pupil-leader relationships to their success in improving participants’ attendance and behaviour at school. In sum, although sport may not be the social panacea some policy makers have claimed, its

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*potential* to contribute to human social wellbeing is clear – if it is carried out in accordance with principles of inclusivity and respect. The principles and values which might enable sport to have a positive social impact have also been the concern of researchers and practitioners interested in sport’s potential to build peace between people groups in conflict zones, and it is to this literature we now turn.

#### **2.2.4 Sport and peacebuilding**

Alongside the research on sport and social exclusion in developed countries, a related field of research has focussed on the increasing use of sport as a vehicle for both international development and peace-building (Black, 2010). This is often referred to as SDP – sport for development and peace (Kidd, 2008; Coalter, 2010; Darnell, 2012) and has been driven by a wide range of actors: nation-states, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), inter-governmental organisations, international sports federations, transnational corporations (especially through corporate social responsibility programmes) and grassroots community based organisations (Giulianotti, 2011). As Donnelly (2011) notes, it was a natural move for Western policy makers and sports organisations, convinced of sport’s benefits at home, to apply the same principles abroad. Similar to the way in which sport is widely viewed as having a positive impact on social exclusion within the UK and other Western nations, an international orthodoxy has been established that sport promotes peace and prosperity. Most notably, the United Nations and the Olympic movement have promulgated such ideals. “To build a better world through sport” is one slogan of the latter. Thus, Giulianotti (2011, p. 207) interprets SDP as being part of an “emerging global civil society movement”.

A typical example of the sincere, if sweeping, statements made in sport’s favour by international

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figures and organisations is a message by Nelson Mandela, written on social networking site Twitter during the opening of the London Olympics: “Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire, it has the power to unite people in a way that little else does” (Mandela, 2012). Yet, the academic debate around SDP is very similar to the one concerning sport and social exclusion: strong claims from policy makers and international NGOs about sport’s transformative power are questioned by researchers taking a more cautious line. For example, in her analysis of six key SDP documents, Hayhurst (2009, p. 203) concluded that “SDP policies are messy, unpredictable, ambiguous and, at times, contradictory”. Likewise, Coalter (2010, p.295) criticises the “almost evangelical policy rhetoric” of the SDP “movement” and the wide variety of organisations and programmes that are subsumed within this “vague and weakly theorized banner”. He concludes that for SDP to make an effective contribution there is a need, “to view research and evaluation in terms of local programme development rather than the legitimization of international organizations and lobbies”. In this way, researchers tend to be more finely attuned to the potential conceptual and empirical limitations of SDP and more concerned with discovering the circumstances under which sport *might* contribute to development and peace-building.

Given that our concern in this research project is with NI, a deeply divided society (Hargie and Dickson, 2004a), we will focus particularly on the relationship between sport and peace. While sporting competition is often portrayed as a generator of goodwill, a forum in which different peoples and nations come together to express a shared interest under common values of respect and fair play, the evidence paints a much more ambiguous picture. Organised, competitive sport frequently serves as an opportunity for the expression of hostility, inter-group difference and often violence.

The malign potential of sport is perhaps especially acute within multi-ethnic states, where people live close together, internal sporting contests are more regular than international competition, and

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inter-group enmity is often especially bitter and volatile (Sugden and Bairner, 2000; Reiche, 2011). Overall, despite the popular idea of sport as a unifying force, some of the evidence supports George Orwell's judgement of sport as "an unfailing cause of ill-will":

"Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words it is war minus the shooting...There cannot be much doubt that the whole thing is bound up with the rise of nationalism – that is, with the lunatic modern habit of identifying oneself with large power units and seeing everything in terms of competitive prestige" (Orwell, 2003).

The relevance of this comment still resonates.

So, how do we make sense of these opposing tendencies, or as Donnelly (2011) calls it, "the Janus-face of sport"? What is clear is that sports per se are not inherently political, but rather they are imbued with particular characteristics that make them susceptible to political manipulation (Allison, 1986; MacClancey, 1996; Whannel, 2008; Carrington, 2010; Sugden, 2010). Most obviously, sports are competitive and confrontational. This allows sporting matches to become symbolic surrogates for existing political conflicts. Sports are also important means of socialisation for young people, and early participation in sports leads to later identification with national-level sports performers as the representatives of one's "way of life" (Sugden and Bairner, 1993, p. 10). Thus, sport is easily co-opted into social identity or ideological struggles between 'us' and 'them', and this is particularly so in divided societies such as NI. Relevant here is Social Identity Theory, which proposes that one's sense of self is drawn from identification with a social group (one's in-group), which is perceived to be markedly different, and superior, to one or more out-groups. In their review of research, Bloomer and Weinreich (2004, p. 143) concluded that, "in relation to identity in NI it is immediately apparent that one theory dominates the academic literature - Social Identity Theory". One reason for this is that identity plays a pivotal role for many people in NI, and it is in the comparison with an 'other' that identity is rooted (Hargie et al., 2008). In conflicts between

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nations and ethnic groups, sport inevitably becomes embroiled in this process of negative comparison, with sporting colours, symbols and success taken as evidence and reassurance of the superiority of one's in-group and inferiority of the out-group. This is of course a larger-scale version of the exclusionary potential of social capital mentioned above. Just as strong bonds within sports clubs and teams may develop hand in hand with negative attitudes to outsiders, so too can sport, at an inter-ethnic or international level, enhance group cohesiveness while worsening relations with others.

Thus the real question (as it was in relation to sport and social exclusion) is not whether sport is 'essentially' divisive or unifying, but rather under what circumstances sport can contribute positively or negatively to intergroup relations. Ethnically divided societies around the world contain examples of sport both reinforcing historic social cleavages, and being used to transcend them. Examples of sports based interventions which offer important lessons for Northern Ireland include Israel (Sugden, 2010), Sri Lanka (Schulenkorf, 2010), the Former Yugoslavia (van Sterkenberg, 2011) and the South Caucasus (van Sterkenberg, 2011).

The influential Football for Peace (F4P) project, which used football coaching to build bridges between neighbouring Jewish and Arab areas within Israel, was assessed by Sugden (2010) who concluded that participants successfully established contacts across community boundaries. Sugden notes that the key lesson from this initiative is that sport "can make a positive if modest contribution to peace building" (2010, p. 258) providing that these micro level projects have the involvement and clear backing of national institutional partners at the macro level. A study of the use of sports events in contributing to ethnic reconciliation in Sri Lanka echoes Sugden's findings and also makes the point that successful sports events which bridged the ethnic divide were those which fostered a 'dual identity status' (Schulenkorf, 2010). Schulenkorf noted that it was important to strategically organise projects and events so that space is given for participants to create an

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overarching identity while at the same time allowing them to celebrate their own ethnic sub-identities.

Two long running large-scale initiatives involving sports interventions in the post-war societies of the former Yugoslavia (Balkaniads) and the former Soviet republics in the South Caucasus (Open Fun Football Schools) have been important vehicles for helping to eradicate prejudices against neighbouring cultures in these regions (van Sterkenburg, 2011). Van Sterkenburg suggests that these projects highlight an important lesson regarding the distinction between institutionalised competitive sport on the one hand and sports festivals/special events with trained mentors on the other. Bridging deep divisions by utilising the former is much more difficult because in the institutionalised competitive context sport tends to be orientated much more toward ‘bonding’ within socially or culturally homogenous groups. However, ‘sports friendships’ developed through the latter kinds of activities do have potential in ‘bridging’ division, particularly if they are combined with other activities which give participants opportunity and encouragement to debate the issues surrounding division.

While not always specifically relevant to the NI context other cases examined of sports interventions for the promotion of social cohesion have been Australia (Hay, 2001), Belgium (Vanreusel et al., 2000), Iraq (Cha, 2009), Lebanon (Reiche, 2011), Mauritius (Edensor and Augustin, 2001), South Africa (Keim, 2003; Höglund and Sundberg, 2008), Spain (Walton, 2005), and Yemen (Stevenson and Alaug, 2000). Other studies review and/or conceptualise the field (e.g. Sugden and Haasner, 2009; Giulianotti, 2011; Cárdenas, 2012). In section 2.4.1 below, we review interventions to enhance social inclusion by sports organisations in NI.

Three consistent themes emerge from studies of sports-based peace-building initiatives. Firstly, the facts that sport is easily understood, popular and accessible mean that it is an ideal activity with



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which to bring people of differing political identities together, especially young people, with the aim of promoting understanding and undermining the group myths and stereotypes which survive mainly through the absence of meaningful inter-group contact. Secondly, in line with the Contact Hypothesis, such contact must occur under appropriate, conducive conditions (Hargie and Dickson, 2004b) i.e. mixed teams, culturally sensitive leadership, institutional and community support, strong policies on mutual respect, and so on – in order for the divisive tendencies of sport to be avoided. Thirdly, sport, on its own, cannot bring peace but can be an important element in wider attempts to bring social and political change after violence has ended.

Yet sport's capacity to support peace is not restricted to activities which bring young people from different backgrounds together. Sport has an interdependent relationship with identity – with sport symbolically reflecting, and reinforcing, the cohesion of a cultural, ethnic or political entity. Accordingly, the symbolism of sport can be harnessed to attempt to build new, more inclusive identities. For example, in their study of sport and reconciliation in South Africa, Höglund and Sundberg (2008) describe how, in addition to grassroots programmes sport has also been used to support peace and integration through new symbols and symbolic acts of reconciliation, and through policies to make national sports teams more representative. The authors' assessment of the work carried out in these domains is generally positive, but comes with some qualifiers.

Certain symbolic moments were certainly emotive, such as Nelson Mandela wearing a Springbok jersey when presenting François Pienaar with the Rugby World Cup trophy in 1995, or the multi-racial South African Olympic team travelling together in an aircraft covered in the new South African flag to the Olympics in Barcelona in 1992. Such totemic events, however, are by nature fleeting and their impact is hard to quantify. Redressing the imbalance of representation in white-dominated sports like rugby has created the familiar ethical and legal dilemmas – and resentment – associated with positive discrimination. Furthermore, an important point about the unifying

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potential of national teams – such as the South African soccer team – is that such potential seems to be dependent on competitive success. Nonetheless, given that, in contexts like South Africa (or indeed NI) where sport has underpinned division, and given the popularity and communicative power of sporting competition, colours and emblems, sport can be a powerful means of undermining destructive and exclusive conflict identities and embedding a political transformation in the popular consciousness.

In closing this section, it is worth reinforcing that the peace-building capacity of sport is not unrelated to the potential for sport to meet social inclusion goals. This is because in areas of violent, inter-communal conflict, aspects of social exclusion – poverty, gender discrimination, hopelessness, run-down and dangerous neighbourhoods, lack of accessible facilities – are often a result of, and are intertwined with, the wider political conflict. This is recognised in the SDP sector – sport for development *and* peace; these are not entirely distinct tasks. The territoriality associated with ethnic conflict can impede access to sport and recreation facilities. Violence damages, and/or causes underinvestment in, neighbourhood infrastructure. The vicious circle of poverty and political violence is well known, and political violence can be related to patriarchal cultures which limit the range of activities accessible to, and deemed acceptable for, women. Thus, in conflict areas, tackling social exclusion and building bridges across a political divide are not mutually exclusive endeavours but are mutually supporting. This is certainly the case in the context of NI.

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## 2.3 Sports exclusion in NI

### 2.3.1 The NI context

The island of Ireland formed a constituent part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland after the Act of Union in 1801. However, the late 19th century and early 20th century saw a concerted campaign for Irish Home Rule. While legislation enabling this was eventually passed in the UK parliament, vigorous and armed opposition from Irish unionists, particularly in Ulster, opposed it. By 1918 moderate home rule nationalism had been eclipsed by militant republican separatism and in the general election of that year Sinn Féin, advocating independence from Britain, won by a landslide. Ulster unionism, however, remained implacably opposed to the implementation of a constitutional break with Great Britain. The British government sought a way out of the problem by dividing the island and in 1921 Ireland was partitioned with the six north-eastern counties from the province of Ulster – subsequently Northern Ireland – remaining part of the United Kingdom. The newly-created northern state had an in-built unionist majority, approximately two-thirds Protestant/unionist and one third Catholic/nationalist (Somerville and Kirby, 2012). Given this backdrop, O'Donnell and Hargie (2011) illustrate how some commentators have argued that NI was by the nature of its creation fundamentally sectarian. However, they also point out that others have highlighted how the equally systemic sectarian nature of the Republic of Ireland (RoI) since its foundation, and its antagonistic attitude to Protestants/unionists until recently, also played a key role in creating and perpetuating sectarianism in both NI and the RoI.

The Protestant/unionist-dominated NI state endured for two generations but by the 1960s, an alienated Catholic minority suffering electoral malpractice and sectarian bias in housing allocation and employment formed a civil rights movement along the lines of campaigns by figures such as Martin Luther King in the USA. Northern Ireland had in effect been a one party state in respect to

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political administration for almost 50 years and the ruling Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) generally reacted with coercive force against the growing demonstrations for equality and social justice. A particularly vicious crackdown by state security forces in Derry/Londonderry on October 5th, 1968, which was captured by the media and relayed worldwide, caused a backlash against the Protestant-dominated police and led to widespread sectarian violence. This led to the emergence of another campaign of violence by the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

The prolonged period of violence which followed, involving principally the IRA, pro-British Protestant paramilitaries that emerged to fight the IRA, and the state security forces, and in which over 3,500 people were killed, is known as ‘the Troubles’. It was brought largely to an end with a peace process and political settlement – the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, 1998, and the subsequent St. Andrews Agreement, 2006 – that reformed how NI was governed. Since May 2007, NI has had ongoing power-sharing government. Despite this political progress, the society remains deeply divided. The political imperative to maintain solidarity with one’s own community, segregated education, historical religious prohibitions on inter-marriage (e.g. the *Ne Temere* decree by the Catholic Church), and the importance of group identification to personal security, especially during ‘the Troubles’, have created and sustained a society in which most people live, learn and worship, largely within sectarian groupings.

The 2011 Census data indicates that NI’s population is more or less equally divided: 45 per cent self-define as Catholic/were brought up as Catholic, and 48 per cent self-define as Protestant/were brought up as Protestant (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), 2012). The division has a spatial dimension; in areas like public housing, 90 per cent is segregated along religious lines and while this only represents 16 per cent of all housing, the vast majority of Catholics and Protestants nonetheless live in areas that are dominated by their own identity group (Nolan, 2014). Only 6.8 per cent of children attend integrated schools, with the remainder attending

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predominantly Protestant or Catholic schools (Nolan, 2014). While the amount of shared urban spaces and facilities has risen, there remains a strong sense of sectarian territoriality, particularly in working class areas; this is evident in disputes pertaining to sectarian parades and celebrations, interface violence and ‘peace’ walls. These walls in turn affect many elements of everyday life in interface areas (Jarman, 2004; Lysaght and Basten, 2003; Hargie et al., 2011a). They also act as a major constraint upon available social and recreational activities (Bairner and Shirlow, 2003).

Furthermore, children are acculturated into this world of sectarianism from an early age, so that from the age of three years they are able to identify preferred in-group symbols of identity (Connolly and Healy, 2004). Similarly, 75 per cent of young people admit to having behaved in a sectarian manner (Sinclair et al., 2004), attributing a combination of family background, sport, school, politics, media, and personal experiences, as the main reasons for their behaviour. Regarding cross-community sports and recreation contact, the 2012 Young Life and Times Survey reported that while just over half of sixteen year olds surveyed socialised or played sports with members of the other community, only 31 per cent did this ‘very often’ and 37 per cent ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ (ARK, 2013). Although the political institutions seem to be relatively stable and widely supported, vote transfers from a nationalist party to a unionist party, or vice versa, are rare.

Most aspects of life reflect the fact that NI is a divided society, and sport is no exception. However, before examining the sporting environment, it is worth briefly probing in more detail the history and nature of division. Some political histories argue the roots of the conflict lie in attempts to integrate Ireland into the British state during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Ruane and Todd, 1996). In this narrative the settling of Protestants from Britain, mainly in the North, created two distinct identity groups on the island: British/Protestant/‘settlers’, most of whom valued the political link with Britain, and Catholic/nationalist/‘natives’ most of whom wished to sever that link. The conflict in NI is thus framed by some academics (and journalists and politicians) in ethno-

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nationalist terms; in other words, the presence of two rival ethnic communities resulted in conflict (e.g. Hughes, 1994; Whyte, 1991).

This perspective has been challenged by revisionist and constructivist political historians in recent times (Patterson, 2006; Bew, 2007; McGrattan, 2010). For example, McGrattan notes of this ‘ethnic-conflict model’ literature:

“What ethnicity actually means is never defined and at best it is assumed that ethnic division influences political and historical outcomes through quasi-psychological, emotive mechanisms. As such the ethnic-conflict model raises more questions than it answers ... Ethnic groups, nations or races in themselves do not have specific attributes that can be identified as causing certain behaviours or political characteristics. Rather, groups are continually created through and shaped by events and, specifically, through how those events are interpreted and framed. Thus, conflict is not ethnic in itself, but can be ‘framed’ in ethnic terms” (2010, p. 9-10).

Most revisionist interpretations question the received truths about the salience of ethnic antagonism in NI and indeed point out that the narrative of ethnic antagonism is itself highly politicised and in many ways an unconvincing explanation of the historical facts. Certainly, adopting ethnic antagonism as *the* explanation arguably tends to obliterate the salience of other questions surrounding gender, class, location and political choices at key historical moments. McGrattan suggests that:

“The ethno-national narrative is a superficially persuasive and easily comprehensible rendering of the ‘Irish question’. ... Previous conflicts are held up as examples of the return of ancient antagonisms, regardless of the fact that in those cases also the decisions of political elites were crucial in shaping the course of events”. (2010, p. 10).

Revisionist historians argue that we must ask how ‘identities’ are created and maintained. If we take them at face value there is the risk that political realities will be obscured and scholars may simply reproduce the stories that elites use/have used to maintain their hegemony within their communities. In NI, according to McGrattan, uncritical acceptance of the ethno-nationalist frame means that:

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“ethnicity is not problematized or defined on the one hand, and the ‘evidence’ used to support what is therefore a rather vague concept tends to originate from elite interviews or secondary material on the other. ... this ‘evidence’ is often deployed in a self-serving, decontextualized fashion” (p.12).

As we shall see below, ethno-nationalism or the ‘ethnic-conflict model’ functions as a key explanatory variable in the area of sports scholarship in Northern Ireland/Ireland, much of which tends to adopt a narrative of tension and struggle between indigenous ‘Irish’ sports, ‘British’ sports and ‘international’ sports, when attempting to explain the intersection of sport and politics. This is understandable on one level because sport has been central in the ‘manufacturing’ of national identities in Ireland over the past two centuries but, as White points out, it is particularly important to examine this manufacturing process in order to understand, “the means by which [Irish] nationalists of the nineteenth century were able to create a modern sense of identity based on their perceived Celtic origins” (2004, p. 325). It has been argued that sport has also played a key role in the construction and maintenance of other socio-political identities in NI (e.g. British loyalist, unionist Irish) which, like the ‘Gaelic’ identity in post-19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland, have tended to exclude what they perceive to be the ‘other’ (Bairner and Shirlow, 1998; Burdsey and Chappell, 2003).

### 2.3.2 Sport and the religious divide

A 2009 Sport NI survey showed that 94 per cent of people are involved in sport in some way, whether playing, spectating, coaching or organising. Almost all surveyed agreed that regular participation in sport contributes to physical and mental health. Moreover, there was strong belief in the social benefits of sport; 81 per cent agreed that it is important to increase the number of sporting opportunities in poorer areas of Northern Ireland, with 35 per cent agreeing strongly. Likewise, 75 per cent agreed with the statement ‘an increase in sporting opportunities in this neighbourhood

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would lead to a decrease in crime or anti-social behaviour around here’ (Sport NI, 2009). The huge commitment to sport is also borne out in the economic data. For example, figures for 2008 show that £688 million was spent by consumers on sport-related goods and services in that year. This was up 43 per cent from 2004, and as a percentage of total expenditure, was slightly higher than the proportion for England. In addition, 17,900 people were employed in sport-related employment (DCAL, n.d.)

Sport is clearly important in NI for a number of reasons not least because many of the most significant sports are divided along sectarian lines. Indeed, so closely does sports preference follow the Catholic-Protestant fault line that, along with religion and schooling, sport is one of the significant markers of communal identity. Accordingly, a significant academic literature has emerged analysing the relationship between sport and identity politics in Ireland. Much of the literature in the area has tended to adopt Sugden and Bairner’s (1993) analysis of the intersection of sport and politics in Ireland/Northern Ireland. Their work has much to commend it, not least because it investigated areas and issues which had previously lacked any serious academic scholarship. Although they do acknowledge that ‘Gaelic’ games as we know them today largely emerged from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Celtic revival movement in Ireland, in many ways their work is underpinned by the ethno-nationalist model as can be seen in their classification of the three ‘kinds’ of sports in NI: Irish/Gaelic games, British games and international games.

They also suggest that: “An overwhelming majority of Catholics are indigenous to the Province with a heritage rooted in Celtic or Gaelic Ireland” (Sugden and Bairner, 1993, p.16), and they note that studying the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) “provides important insights into the deeply rooted character of ethnic and cultural differences in Northern Ireland” (p.5). This idea is also promulgated by many subsequent authors on the subject. For example, Devine and Devine (2004) claim that “For centuries Gaelic games have been at the heart of the Nationalist community in



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Northern Ireland” (p. 180). White (2004) however points out that contemporary political historians are extremely critical of ethnic nationalisms that are largely inventions of the recent past and many now argue that the history of all European peoples is one based on waves of migration and that “the idea of fixed, separated peoples who lived in isolation of each other forming distinct national identities is a myth itself”. He also notes: “In the Irish context, even though the Celts began migrating to Ireland in the sixth century BC, no one identified themselves as Celtic until the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century” (p. 332).

White (2004) suggests that in situations where nationalism challenges imperial power, socio-cultural institutions are required and indeed can play a pivotal role in linking the masses with elite constructed national myths. He argues that in Ireland the GAA was particularly important in this regard in helping to promote and consolidate the Gaelic revival at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and indeed played a vital role in developing a unique sense of national identity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one in sharp contrast to that of the British. As he notes, this was a significant achievement although it does contain certain ironies:

“Nationalist ideals cannot be propagated without an institutional framework to disseminate the particular myth of the nation advanced by nationalist elites. One organization that was critical in the cultural realm that organized and symbolized the effort to ‘invent’ the modern sense of Celtic or Gaelic Irish nationalism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). The GAA provided an important organizational mechanism for people to consciously support and play the nationalist games. It thus played a contributing role in the effort at creating and defining Irish popular culture in Gaelic terms. Even though these games came to be played and organized based on a Victorian conception of spectator sport, the games came to symbolize to Irish nationalists their own separate history, culture, and identity” (White, 2004, p. 335) .

Gaelic sports are those which either have some claim to have originated in Ireland or were invented/developed in Ireland such as Gaelic football, hurling, camogie, rounders and handball. They are played and promoted under the auspices of the Gaelic Athletic Association and, as noted above, many studies of politics as well as sport in Ireland make clear the importance of this

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organisation to the construction of Irish identity (Cronin, 1999; Bairner, 2005; Hassan, 2005). Founded in 1884, the GAA formed part of the Gaelic revival, a cultural movement intended to redress the decline in indigenous Irish culture and an important component in the development of modern Irish nationalism. Within NI, Gaelic games are played almost exclusively by the Catholic community, and the GAA, along with the Catholic Church, has been one of the pillars of nationalist community life. Devine and Devine (2004) emphasise the “strong link between the Catholic Church and Gaelic games, which ensures there is a family atmosphere at matches and crowd control and hooliganism have never been an issue” (p. 177). This may be largely true, but this very relationship could alienate Protestants who may give some thought to attending or participating in these sports. Indeed Ewart et al’s (2004) research found that for young Protestants “Gaelic sports were either seen as an integral part of the nationalist-Irish culture or as a sectarian activity that largely excluded Protestants” (2004, p. 42).

Indeed, unionist politicians have frequently criticised two aspects of the GAA, which they regard as particularly problematic. One is the naming of some GAA grounds, trophies or competitions in memory of individuals whom unionists regard as republican terrorists. The second is the political nature of parts of the GAA (2014) Constitution, which states in the introduction that: “Those who play its games, those who organise its activities and those who control its destinies see in the G.A.A. a means of consolidating our Irish identity. The games to them are more than games – they have a national significance ... Since she has not control over all the national territory, Ireland’s claim to nationhood is impaired” (p. 4). It further states that: “The Association is a National Organisation which has as its basic aim the strengthening of the National Identity in a 32 County Ireland through the preservation and promotion of Gaelic Games and pastimes” (p. 5). At a major Conference on ‘Sport and Reconciliation’, DUP Minister for Social Development, Nelson McCausland (2013) urged the GAA to address these two issues, pointing out that they would make it very problematic for a unionist to join a GAA club.

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Thus, because of its Catholic, nationalist ethos, the GAA has been held in low esteem by Protestants, being perceived as, at best, unwelcoming to non-nationalists, and at worst, a sectarian front for the IRA (Cronin, 2000). The constitution of the organisation enshrines the GAA's nationalist ethos and, historically, has included a number of rules which actively excluded the Protestant population. Until 1971 the GAA enforced a ban on members ('Rule 27') from playing or attending 'foreign' games (such as rugby, hockey and soccer)<sup>2</sup>. 'Rule 21' prevented members of the security forces from joining the GAA, a ban that was removed in November 2001 (see Hassan, 2005). 'Rule 42', which banned 'foreign' sports from GAA grounds, was eventually amended in 2005. Fulton and Bairner (2007) noted that for many "the issue of Rule 42 was not merely a defining moment in the history of the association or of Irish sport in general. It was seen, more fundamentally, as a defining moment in the recent history of Ireland, a measure ... of the extent to which (if at all) Ireland had modernised" (p. 57). Indeed, given the history and significance of the GAA in Irish nationalist culture these changes must be viewed as very positive developments toward inclusiveness within the Association as an all-Ireland organisation. With the ending of the ban on security force personnel and perhaps due to recent cross-community initiatives (see section 2.4.1) Protestant attitudes to the GAA may well be changing. Indeed, it is interesting that in Ewart et al.'s study for young people who identified themselves as Protestants one of the things that they either "liked" or "found acceptable" about the 'other' culture was Gaelic sports (Ewart et al., 2004, p. 57).

It is, however, worth noting that some commentators have argued that GAA branches north and south of the border have developed very different outlooks because of the 'Troubles'. Sugden and Bairner suggest: "of necessity the GAA now plays two radically different roles in Irish cultural and political life. In the Irish Republic its role is complicated by the fact that it must now compete with other sports, notably soccer, for the right to be regarded as the 'national' game, whereas for

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<sup>2</sup> This ruling had caused considerable controversy, including most notably when the GAA removed the then President of Ireland, Douglas Hyde, from his position as a Patron of the Association following his attendance at a soccer match between Ireland and Poland in Dalymount Park, Dublin in 1938.

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northern Gaels the only truly ‘nationalist’ sports remain those peculiar to Ireland” (1993, p. 41). Cronin (2000) reiterates this point more starkly when he states that in NI “Gaelic games can be seen as sports that support the Catholic population through its exclusiveness, stresses political aspirations that champion the cause of an Irish Republic and that exclude the broad Protestant/unionist population” (p. 26). Indeed arguably the ‘Troubles’ have had an enormous impact on issues of inclusion/exclusion surrounding all of the main team sports in NI.

Rugby is often vaunted for apparently avoiding the sectarianism that has plagued soccer. In what Tuck (2005, p.107) calls “a series of national cultural paradoxes”, spectators from north and south, Catholic and Protestant, come together to support a similarly diverse team representing the entire island of Ireland, while Irish and British players unite under the British and Irish Lions team. However, the relative harmoniousness of the rugby scene is not as miraculous as it may appear. Firstly, rugby’s history is not politically unblemished, with periodic disputes over organisation and symbols. There have been sectarian problems, with, for instance, on-going debate surrounding the Republic of Ireland anthem and flag being used at international games in Dublin, given that the team is comprised of players from the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland.

This issue was brought into sharp focus in 2007 when an international rugby game between Ireland and Italy was played at Ravenhill stadium, the home of Ulster rugby, in Belfast. Prior to this there had been an apparent understanding within the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) that when an international was played in the south or north the flag and anthem of that jurisdiction would be used. However, when the first international for some 50 years was played in NI the IRFU did not allow the flag or anthem of the UK to be used at Ravenhill. Rather, the game was somewhat paradoxically treated as an ‘away’ fixture with the neutral anthem, ‘Ireland’s Call’, played and the flag of the IRFU flown. Indeed, this is now the official policy of the IRFU as explained by their spokesman in 2009 following an ‘A’ international between Ireland and Tonga at Ravenhill when

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the same issues emerged: “The policy for the IRFU is that Ireland’s Call only is played outside the Republic of Ireland jurisdiction. And inside the Republic of Ireland jurisdiction both the Soldier’s Song and Ireland’s Call are played.” (*News Letter*, 2012). The impact of this decision on the northern unionist rugby fraternity was illustrated by former Irish rugby international and unionist politician Trevor Ringland, who commented:

“As we move forward, it is a choice between taking all anthems out of our sport, leaving Ireland’s Call, or we can continue with the deal whereby the Soldier’s Song is played in Dublin, and our anthem in Belfast. This season, despite our history, I will stand for the Soldier’s Song while the Irish tricolour flies. I hope in return that when the Irish team play in Belfast in the future, those from the south can return the gesture of respect” (*The Irish Independent*, 2012).

Secondly, Sugden and Bairner (1993) suggest that the Southern support for rugby is based in a social group, and private schools, which have their origins in Britain’s presence in Ireland, and thus, the rugby community, north and south, have a common socio-political heritage. Thirdly, they argue that the political outlook of NI rugby supporters may be moderate compared to many working-class Protestants, but it has nonetheless been solidly unionist and thus has contributed to the political and social cohesiveness of the pro-Union community. Without reference to any actual empirical data derived from the groups themselves, Sugden and Bairner explain the attitudes and psychology of Northern Irish players and supporters for the all-Ireland rugby team. In their view, northern Protestants engage in ‘cultural nationalism’ or ‘symbolic sportive nationalism’ (similar to the Scots and the Welsh) when playing for or supporting Ireland whereas northern Catholics play for or support the Irish rugby team for reasons of ‘political nationalism’ because for the Catholics of NI who long for a united Ireland this is what the team symbolically represents.

However, it must be said that over 20 years on from the publication of Sugden and Bairner’s text the political landscape of both Britain and Ireland has changed dramatically following what has arguably been the most significant constitutional change since the Act of Union in 1801. The UK

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has a more federal structure. A nationalist party, the SNP, governs Scotland. Wales is governed by a legislature based in Cardiff and in NI governance is on the basis of a devolved consociational power sharing administration. While the 2011 Census in NI indicates that 45 per cent of the population are from a Catholic community background, only 25 per cent of the population defined their national identity as solely 'Irish' (NISRA, 2012). Given such political and constitutional change, separating 'cultural', 'symbolic sportive' and 'political' nationalisms is arguably not straightforward. Rather than constituting a monolithic Irish/Catholic/republican bloc, this community seems in some senses fractured in respect to identity. It should also be recognised that according to some commentators, who point to the presence of unionist 'identities' and particularly their relevance in relation to sport in NI, the same can be said of the British/Protestant/unionist community. Bairner (2003) notes:

"On one hand, there is Ulster loyalism, which is defined by a primary imagined community of Northern Irish Protestant and a secondary, conditional loyalty to the British state. ... On the other hand, there is an Ulster British ideology that is defined by a primary loyalty to the imagined community of Greater Britain and a secondary regional patriotism for Northern Ireland ... members of this Ulster British tradition certainly represent Ireland in sports such as rugby union, field hockey, and cricket, which suggests that at some level of their consciousness at least there is an awareness of an Irish identity, as opposed to a British or narrowly Ulster identity" (p. 523).

Bairner (2003) argues that soccer has close links to the loyalist tradition, while "rugby union is more in tune with an Ulster British perspective that, it is argued, is able to co-exist with an Irish dimension at least for sporting purposes" (p. 524). Bairner suggests that these factors, along with the advent of professionalism and a growing Catholic middle class, led to a growth in interest and involvement in rugby by Northern Irish Catholics in recent years.

According to the tripartite framework, 'international sports' are those which, although they may have British origins, have become so popular worldwide that they have 'left behind' their British associations. Association football or soccer is the prime example, which we will discuss in more detail below, but others include golf, boxing and cycling. Boxing is primarily a working-class sport, popular among both Protestants and Catholics. However, it has also become embroiled in the

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politics of NI through controversy over which nation state – Ireland or the UK – boxers should represent in international competitions (Cronin, 1997). The image of being free from sectarianism has been challenged by claims by the NI Sandy Row (Protestant) boxing club that it has suffered years of sectarian abuse (*Belfast Telegraph*, 2012a). Cycling has also been affected by communal politics in that previously two governing bodies existed, one associated with each community since 1949. However, in 2007 the Northern Ireland Cycling Federation and Cycling Ulster agreed to amalgamate and affiliate to Cycling Ireland with the proviso that individual members can opt for their preferred nationality on their licence.

Although soccer is popular across the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland, the sport has on many occasions provided a shared arena for displays of difference and hostility, rather than harmony, between Protestant and Catholics. Each community has its ‘own’ teams both at local level and on the island of Ireland (Northern Ireland is mainly supported by Protestants while many northern Catholics opt to support the Republic of Ireland). In addition, there is considerable support in NI for Glasgow Celtic and Glasgow Rangers along sectarian lines (Catholic and Protestant respectively). The organisation of association football or soccer has a long and complicated history and while it now reflects the partition of Ireland – with a northern international team and league, and a southern international team and league – this has not always been the case. Indeed up until 1921, when the south left the association following the partition of Ireland, there was an all-Ireland international team, and until 1953 there were two ‘Irelands’ playing international matches both of which selected players from across the island. In the 1950 World Cup four players actually played for both teams in the qualifying tournament which ultimately led to FIFA’s 1953 decree that the team representing the Belfast based Irish Football Association (IFA) would henceforth be called ‘Northern Ireland’ and the team representing the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) would be the ‘Republic of Ireland’.

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Many commentators on the game argue that unionists in general have valued the Northern Ireland team as a symbol of their separateness from the rest of Ireland, while soccer, according to Hassan (2002), has played a ‘counter-hegemonic’ role for Northern nationalists through their support for the Republic of Ireland and local ‘non-unionist’ teams. While this is undoubtedly a simplification, it does contain a degree of truth. Cronin (2000) noted that “despite the fact that soccer has always been a game that provides a common language for everyone in Northern Ireland ... the actual operation of senior soccer in the Province has not reflected this common interest ... the game is predominantly Protestant” (p. 34). Likewise Bairner (2004) argued “Despite their love of the game and the fact that they have played in large numbers for Irish League teams and the Northern Ireland national team, nationalists have tended to feel unwelcome in the general context of local senior soccer” (p. 275).

There is no doubt that especially during the ‘Troubles’ soccer came to act “as a source of identity for young, male Protestants in the face of problems related to deindustrialisation, unemployment and their fears for the future of Northern Ireland” (Burdsey and Chappell, 2003) which led to many football grounds and especially Windsor Park becoming spaces where Catholic fans felt excluded. Bairner and Shirlow (1998) note that “Sporting venues in Northern Ireland as elsewhere, consistently emerge as sites for the reproduction of a sense of alienation from the ‘other’” (p. 169), and this was undoubtedly the case at Windsor Park, the home stadium of Linfield FC and the Northern Ireland international team, which at one point witnessed aggressive sectarian chanting. However it would be remiss not to point out that much has been done to successfully change the experience of attending Northern Ireland international matches in recent years. The Irish Football Association’s Community Relations programme has, along with the Amalgamation of Northern Ireland Supporters Clubs, made a huge impact in countering the sectarianism displayed by a certain section of the crowd that had blighted Northern Ireland games (Bairner, 2004), and which had been exacerbated by republican paramilitary bomb attacks and hoaxes in the vicinity of Windsor Park on



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some match days. Walsh (2012, p. 4) notes that “In 2006 delegates from UEFA and the EU awarded the Amalgamation of Official Northern Supporters Clubs with the prestigious Brussels International Supporters Award, for their efforts to stamp out sectarianism”. It is clear these efforts have had an effect with a recent study by Hargie et al. (2011b) finding that for young NI international players from a Catholic community background Windsor Park was rated low on exclusionary factors, although the playing of the UK anthem at international games remained a point of contention among team members from a nationalist/republican background.

Overall, recalling the discussion above about the simultaneous bonding and excluding effects of sports cultures, most sports in NI have functioned as powerful means of in-group socialisation, strengthening the cohesiveness of each community while offering few opportunities for cross-community contact. Some sports have also been a key site of cultural contestation in the political struggle between unionism and nationalism, and sports players and events did, on occasion, become caught up in paramilitary violence during ‘the Troubles’ (Hassan and O’Kane, 2012). The impact of sectarianism reduces the accessibility of sports to people who are not from the sports’ traditional constituency. The national or cultural symbols of the sports may be unfamiliar and/or alienating. Clubs may be located in territory regarded as belonging to the other community. Many people will simply have no experience of the other community’s sports since sports education and participation, for most, begin in school and most schooling is segregated between Catholics and Protestants. Thus, sports, like schools, churches and housing, are part of the sectarian ‘system’ which reproduces itself and conditions the choices of people in NI (Liechty and Clegg, 2001).

The strong link between sport and nationalism is evident in the frequent high-profile controversies over the national team preferences of NI sports people. The 2012 Olympics brought the issue into focus yet again, as athletes were split between those representing Team Great Britain and Team Ireland, in some cases arbitrarily due to the governing body structure of the different sports.

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Previous well-known cases concerned footballer Neil Lennon and boxers Barry McGuigan and Wayne McCullough who each faced sectarian intimidation for ‘betraying’ their communities and representing the ‘enemy’s’ country. The footballer James McClean provoked ire among some quarters of the Protestant community by opting to play for the Republic of Ireland in 2011, despite having played at Under-21 level for Northern Ireland. The preference of some Northern Catholics to play for the Republic is a relatively recent phenomenon (Hassan, et al., 2009; Hargie et al., 2011b). This was officially recognised by the Court of Arbitration for Sport ruling in Lausanne in 2010 that anyone born in Northern Ireland could choose to represent the Republic of Ireland in international football. Golfer Rory McIlroy publicly agonised over his no-win dilemma of whether to represent Ireland or Britain at the 2016 Olympics (*Belfast Telegraph*, 2012b), before opting for the former.

However, notwithstanding persistent controversies, sports in NI have, in recent years, endeavoured to become more inclusive and welcoming to people who have not traditionally participated. This includes outreach among women, people with disabilities, older people, and ethnic minorities, as well as across the political/communal divide. Moreover, many organisations have used sport as a vehicle for cross-community contact and peace-building, and as a positive diversionary activity for marginalised young people. Sports inclusion initiatives in NI are reviewed in section 2.4.1.

Exclusion based on the sectarian divide, while important, is not the only aspect of social exclusion from sporting activity in NI. In Northern Irish society, as in other societies it is widely recognised that differences in sports participation exist among certain groups within the population. For example the literature demonstrates that, generally, men participate more than women; people without a disability participate more than those with a disability; and younger people participate more than older people. Other groups reported to face exclusion are LGB people, transgender people, less well-off people, and those from ethnic minority communities (Northern Ireland Assembly: Research and Library Services, 2010).

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### 2.3.3 Sport and women

Gender has been defined as “a social construct that outlines the roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a particular society believes are appropriate for men and women” (Right to Play, 2008, p.127). Therefore, gender is strongly performative as we all perform what it is to be a male or female, demonstrating masculinity and femininity traits through our actions (Schlichter, 2011). In this sense, gender is something that we ‘do’ rather than something that we ‘are’ (Hargie, 2006). In the 1970s and 1980s, campaigns for gender equality emerged, with the aim of establishing equal rights for women across a range of contexts (Weedon, 1997). Sport is viewed as one battleground in this struggle for gender equality (Liston, 2006). Kay (2014) argues that:

“[S]port has a very direct and fundamental relevance to combating women’s SEx [social exclusion]. If sporting practices reinforce hegemony in the rest of society, then challenging them amounts to challenging gender inequity in social relations” (p. 98).

It is well known that sport can be used to focus attention on the prevailing gender divisions of a particular culture (Spaaij et al., 2014). Thus, MacClancey (1996, p. 14) noted that, “The sorts of questions relevant here are: why do women participate in particular sports? Why don’t they participate in certain other ones? How do they construct and transform them? What meanings and values do different sports hold for them?”

In relation to sport, the notion of ‘femininity’ has stereotypically portrayed women as being naturally weaker and more fragile in comparison to men (Dillabough et al., 2008). In contrast, male sports are typically characterised by muscularity, strength and the presence of physical contact (Gorely et al., 2003). Scraton and Flintoff (2002) note:

“It is argued that differences in female sports participation are the results of socialization practices carried out by institutions such as the family, the media and school. For example, girls are socialized into ‘feminine’ activities such as netball, gymnastics, or hockey and into ‘feminine’ physicality, and boys are socialized into ‘masculine’ sports such as football, rugby or cricket and into a ‘masculine’ physicality” (p. 32).

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Thus gender ‘appropriate’ sport can discriminate against females participating in ‘male’ sports and vice-versa, although the latter is less discussed and publicised. While the actual ban on women playing at Football League grounds in Britain was removed in 1972 (Williams, 2003), football continues to be male dominated at both national and local levels across Europe. In addition, women continue to be excluded from participation in a range of sports due to various factors associated with the distinction between sport and femininity.

For young people aged 5-16 years old physical education (PE) is compulsory in schools across the UK and Ireland, and schools are required to provide at least two hours of physical activity per week (DCAL/Sport NI, 2009). Within the UK, the majority of schools teach separately traditionally ‘masculine’ (i.e. football and rugby) or ‘feminine’ (i.e. netball and hockey) sports to boys and girls. It has been argued that this contributes to the reinforcement of stereotypical views of femininity and masculinity within the education system (Clark and Paechter, 2007). Such attitudes undoubtedly increase feelings of exclusion from certain sports for some students, but have a particularly negative impact on young females. For example, the UK Olympic gold heptathlon medal winner Jessica Ennis has expressed the view that sport “has to change. It’s important that girls aren’t afraid of sport...I remember when I first started doing weight training I didn’t want to be any good at it because I didn’t want to be all muscly” (Biss, 2012, p. 22).

Many recent studies have demonstrated that both the UK’s physical education (PE) curriculum and the school environment itself discourage female participation in sport. Greggs’ (2008) research highlights the disengagement of girls from the PE curriculum in England and Wales and assesses the successes and failures of attempts to introduce alternative curriculums at some schools. Hills and Croston’s (2012) study of 12 and 13 year old girls’ experiences of PE in a North of England co-educational comprehensive school found that the PE curriculum is “underpinned by beliefs about differences in boys’ and girls’ attitudes, behaviours, abilities and experiences that can reinforce

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traditional gendered power relationships and limit [girls] opportunities for participation and learning” (p. 591) and manifests itself in male domination of teaching time, space and play. They note that attempts at mixed-gender PE initiatives met with mixed results and many still led to the exclusion of young females, with, for example boys generally refusing to pass to girls in joint basketball games.

Away from the formal PE curriculum there is evidence that playground sporting activity in regard to popular team sports in the UK also tends to be male dominated. Clark and Paechter’s (2007) study of 10-11 year olds in two London primary schools revealed very little evidence of equal participation in playground football games, despite attempts to actually promote it by the school as a game for girls. In fact, girls tended to be marginalised territorially by boys who actively excluded them from the playground ‘pitch’ and they noted this was “compounded by boys co-optation of football as ‘inherently masculine’” (p. 261). Even the formation of a girls football team at one of the schools did not satisfactorily resolve the problem of exclusion with “most girls remaining marginal to the game at both schools” (p. 264), and any girl that did develop good skills and technique was praised for being “able to ‘play like a boy’” (p. 265). Francis (2009) suggests that gender segregation is being reinforced through the education system both in PE classes and the general school curriculum, from primary level through to further education, while Dagkas and Armour (2012) contend that the present school PE curriculum, which inculcates gender-segregated sports, needs to be reformed.

Kay asserts that “Collectively, girls and women identify with sport far less than do boys and men. Sport also seems to be least valued among women most vulnerable to SEx [social exclusion], including those from lower social classes, those from non-white populations, and disabled and elderly groups” (2014, p. 97). In 2011 the Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation (WSFF) reported that only 12 per cent of 14-year-old girls engage in recommended levels of physical activity in the

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UK, whereas twice as many boys of the same age achieve these levels (Biss, 2012). In NI, gender imbalances are evident within sport participation, with all age groups showing higher male participation rates. Despite the past decade witnessing an increase in women's participation in sport across the UK and Ireland, statistics reveal that in NI there is still a clear disparity between male and females. Sport NI (2011a) highlighted that:

- 70 per cent of females never participate in sport
- 34 per cent of females achieve the recommended amount of weekly physical activity (30 minutes, 5 days a week) compared with 36 per cent of males
- more women think it is important to be healthy, yet there has been little change in the level of female participation in sport in the past 20 years
- men spend almost twice as much time on sport as women
- more than twice as many men as women are members of a sports club.

The WSFF (2007) attribute two key reasons for the sporting arena being perceived as a male domain. Firstly, sport facilities often prioritise male specific sports, for example indoor and outdoor football, where allocation of pitch time is given to men at popular or preferred times, often in block bookings. Secondly, sport from a young age is reinforced as a male domain specifically within the education system, with greater attention, encouragement and resources being given to 'male' sports. In fact, boys are reported to dominate the playground when playing their sport, resulting in negative perceptions of sport being instilled in women. Furthermore, within leadership roles in sport, for example coaching and club officers, and administration staff, gender imbalances are evident as a higher percentage of males than females hold these positions. The most recent comprehensive UK wide survey indicated that the composition of sporting organisations' committees was only 29 per cent female (WSFF, 2007) and unfortunately improvements in this level of representation appear to be very slow. As of 2013 *UK Sport's* 'UK Strategy Framework for Women and Sport' still lists as one of its key targets "at least 30% representation by women on strategic sports boards and

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committees” (<http://www.uksport.gov.uk/pages/women/>). In NI, research suggests that factors contributing to lower participation for females in sport are related to multiple social roles, for example family responsibilities, employment demands, time constraints and normative influences (Coalter and Taylor, 2005).

Despite female participation in sport increasing, female-oriented sports have consistently received much less attention in the media than male sports (Duncan and Messner, 1998; Elling and Knoppers, 2005; Cooky et al., 2013). Competitive male sports, and in particular male team sports, receive higher media coverage, and much higher production values in that coverage, compared with female sports (Collins with Kay, 2014). In a review following the 2012 London Olympics the WSFF noted that female sport accounted for only 5 per cent of media coverage of sport in the UK (<http://www.wsff.org.uk/the-challenge/the-challenge-elite-sportswomen>). Therefore, a lack of positive female role models exist in the media, and even those females who are at the top of their sport are commonly portrayed as “decorative and passive” (NI Assembly: Research and Library Services, 2010, p. 3).

Gender mainstreaming efforts over the past decade have pushed the equality agenda for women in relation to sports participation and as noted above participation rates are rising. For example, in the London 2012 Olympic games, women were represented in every event, the first time this has happened since the modern games began in Athens in 1896, with 4,847 female athletes competing in 2012 (Biss, 2012). It was also the first time that the Muslim state Saudi Arabia permitted female athletes to represent their country in the games (The Sport and Science Resource, 2012). Of the 204 countries participating in the Olympics, three countries still remained represented by male-only teams, namely Barbados, Nauru and St Kitts and Nevis (*The Telegraph*, 2012). However all countries who have established a national Olympic committee are represented by mixed teams. There is also evidence that in some countries females actually participate more in sport than males.

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Thus, Van Tuyckom et al. (2010) found significant inconsistent gender differences in sports participation, in that while in Belgium, France, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Spain, and the UK, males participated more in sport than females, the opposite was the case in Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and the Netherlands. In addition, there were wide gender differences in participation by age across these countries.

Overall, it is clear that women remain under-represented in virtually all aspects of sport: grassroots sport, elite sport, media coverage, and sports administration and leadership.

#### **2.3.4 Sport and socio-economic status**

Socio-economic status (SES) denotes level of “access to material and social resources and assets, or rank within a social-economic hierarchy, or both” (Matthews and Gallo, 2011, p. 502). Research has shown a very strong relationship between higher SES and better health, with this association beginning at an early stage and being consistent throughout life (Ruijsbroek et al., 2011). Low SES has consistently been associated with increased mortality rates and morbidity, decreased health protective behaviours such as healthy eating and physical exercise, and greater health risk behaviours such as alcohol intake and smoking (Conner et al., 2013). This is perhaps not surprising given that:

Those deprived economically and living in disadvantaged neighborhoods face a variety of chronic stressors in daily living: They struggle to make ends meet; have few opportunities to achieve positive goals; experience more negative life events such as unemployment, marital disruption, and financial loss; and must deal with discrimination, marginality, isolation, and powerlessness (Pampel et al., 2010, p. 353).

Given these problems, there is a close relationship between poverty and social exclusion (see



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section 2.2.1). A similar linkage exists between low SES and exclusion from sporting activities. Those who are unemployed, underemployed, or living on the minimum wage, are less likely to be able to afford the costs associated with many sports in general, and with more expensive sporting pursuits in particular. There is now voluminous research to show a strong connection between low SES and lower levels of participation in sports activity (e.g. Gidlow et al., 2006; Cerin and Leslie, 2009; Bengoechea et al., 2010; Leslie et al., 2010; Hirvensalo & Lintunen, 2011). This relationship has been found to be significant with both children and adults (Stalsberg and Pedersen, 2010), and to be consistent across sports (Federico et al., 2013). There is also some evidence that children of lower SES tend to engage less in organised or team sports, while having similar levels of other physical activity, such as playing during school-breaks or in the community playground (Nielsen et al., 2012).

It should also be recognised that there have been conflicting research findings, with some studies reporting no clear linkages between SES and level of involvement in sport. One reason for this is the lack of consistency with regard to how sports participation and physical activity are measured (Thomas et al., 2011). Different studies use varying measures to assess activity and participation, some employing self-reporting by respondents and others more objective measures (e.g. pedometer or accelerometer). This makes comparisons across studies difficult. There are also problems with the measurement of SES (Braveman et al., 2005). Indeed Matthews and Gallo (2011, p. 502) describe SES as “a complex, multidimensional construct that has been conceptualized and measured in diverse ways”. Measures of SES employed in research studies encompass a range of criteria including, inter alia, income, employment status, occupation, educational attainment, eligibility for free or reduced cost school lunches, and living in social housing. In addition, the relative value of a criterion measure such as ‘level of income’ may differ across location, and indeed racial or ethnic group, within the same sample. This again makes comparisons of research studies problematic.

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A number of studies have investigated those factors that moderate and mediate the pathways between SES and involvement in sport and physical activity (e.g. Burton et al., 2003; Ball et al., 2007; Cleland et al., 2010; Toftegaard-Støckel et al., 2011). While the precise causal nature of the links between SES, impinging factors, and participation in particular sports, remain unclear, some key factors have been identified. It has been found that personal factors, such as setting priorities for sport and recognising that participation is an important activity that necessitates a certain level of commitment, positive intentions to engage in sporting activity and the development of related routines and scheduling, feelings of guilt for not participating, levels of enjoyment of the activity, and feelings of self-efficacy about being able to maintain the level of commitment, all help to increase physical leisure activity and sporting levels among lower SES individuals. Important environmental factors include accessible and pleasant sport and recreation areas and a safe neighbourhood. Finally, key social factors involve support and encouragement for sporting activities from family and friends, parental and peer involvement in, and positive attitude to, sport, membership of a sport or recreation club, dog ownership, and lower levels of television viewing. In relation to the latter point, children from lower income households have been shown to be more likely to have media access in their bedrooms and to spend more time watching TV with their parents, and less likely to have access to portable play equipment (bicycle, skipping rope, etc.), than children from higher SES families (Tandon et al., 2012).

What is clear is that individuals of higher SES are more likely to participate in sport and leisure time activities compared to those from lower socio-economic groups. Those of lower SES also tend to be more obese; although they often engage in more physical work-related activities than those of higher SES, they are less likely to be active in the domains of sport and physical activity (Brennan et al., 2010). Furthermore, individuals from different SES tend to participate in different sports and leisure physical activity. For females, SES is known to influence the type of sport played, in that those of higher SES are more likely to engage in high intensity sports and physical activity

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(Macintyre and Mutrie, 2004). Finally, location has the potential to exclude sports participation, as those living in socially deprived areas with higher crime rates are more likely to be discouraged from participating in community sports or individual activities such as jogging (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2010).

In terms of the effects of SES on exclusion from sport, Hylton and Totten (2013) summarised the current situation as follows:

participation in sport, games and physical activities varies by socio-economic group: the 'higher' the group, the more likely participation becomes...overall socio-economic status appears to bear a direct relationship to ability to participate in physical activities, thus reflecting social inequalities. Increasingly austere times are likely to exacerbate class differences, sport and recreation participation and 'choices'...these inequalities pose challenges for sport development to resolve (p. 46).

These challenges need to be met by sports providers, in terms of increasing the participation rates of those from lower SES backgrounds. To fail to address the extant inequities caused by differential income levels will increase the exclusion of those individuals who tend to be most in need of the range of benefits that sport can provide.

### 2.3.5 Sport and older people

While ageing is a process that no individual can avoid, ageing successfully, i.e. having low risk of disease and disability and high cognitive physical functional capabilities as well as engaging in social and productive activities, is increasingly viewed as a benefit that sport and physical activity can deliver to older people (Dafna et al., 2012). Arguably in recent times a positive aging discourse is replacing the medicalised discourse that dominated much of 20<sup>th</sup> century thinking about aging populations. Dionigi (2006) notes that: "This trend reflects an emerging cultural emphasis on physical activity, leisure, and sport as strategies for maintaining the physical, social, and psychological health of older people ... and reducing the health care cost associated with aging

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populations” (p. 182).

It is now generally accepted that engaging in sport has the potential to help maintain physical fitness and strength in order for older people to live independent lives (Nelson et al., 2007; Evans and Sleaf, 2012), but of course the resources, both educational and in terms of facilities, must be in place if they are to benefit from the advantages of sport. Sport NI (2011c) pointed out that in NI:

- over half a million people are over 55 – some 32 per cent of the population
- more people are over the age of 50 than under the age of 19
- by 2030 the number of people over 50 will have increased by more than 30 per cent
- only 26 per cent of people aged over 50 achieve the recommended amount of weekly physical activity (30 minutes, 5 days a week) compared with 35 per cent of the total population
- 79 per cent of over 50 year olds never participate in moderate intensity sport
- 20 per cent of older people admit that they cannot remember the last time they did any exercise
- 50 per cent of all functional decline among older people can be attributed to physical inactivity
- the most popular physical activities for people aged over 50 are walking, golf and/or pitch and putt and going to the gym or swimming.

Research outlines numerous reasons which may account for these low participation statistics. Older people can perceive themselves as being ‘past it’ or classify themselves as unfit (Allender et al., 2006), affecting their attitudes to sport and decisions about whether to participate. Another issue which has been highlighted is a lack of suitable sporting activities available which are relevant to their age group and targets their needs (DCAL/Sport NI, 2009). Issues of transport may prevent older people from participating in sport if they do not drive or have easy access to public transport;

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this is especially an issue for those living in rural areas (NI Assembly: Research and Library Services, 2010). It has also been shown that time constraints can affect older people's participation. For example, many are engaged in voluntary activities which can result in less time available to dedicate to sport (Nicholson, 2004). Older people often have caring responsibilities, such as looking after grandchildren or caring for a long-term ill or disabled partner. In addition to these barriers, many of those aged 65 years and over are not able to participate in any form of vigorous or moderately intense physical activity or sport due to bodily impairments such as arm and leg weaknesses which raise safety concerns relating to fear of injury (Nicholson, 2004). For many older people, sport can be perceived as too much of a physical challenge (Kluge, 2002). However, Evans and Sleaf (2012) found that for this group participation in sport facilitated individual and independent management of these physical limitations.

For older people, engaging in sport can be experienced as fun and enjoyable, with the potential benefits including increased life satisfaction (Rowe and Kahn, 1997), developing social networks and support (Nadasen, 2003), and improvements in health (Taylor et al., 2004). However, research has also highlighted that there is a lack of awareness of the health and social-psychological benefits of engaging in sport, as shown in a study of Scottish older people aged 65-84 years old (Crombie et al., 2004). For older people, participation in sport requires a complex interlinking of aesthetic, medical and physical considerations. Therefore, steps need to be taken to address the anxieties and fears experienced by older people, to promote the benefits of sport, and to make sports participation for older people readily accessible.

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### 2.3.6 Sport and disability

Disability has been defined as: “any physical or mental condition that limits a person’s movements, senses or activities” (Right to Play, 2008, p.169). However, it is worth noting that there is an on-going debate surrounding terminology in this area (Palmer and Harley, 2012). For example, it has been argued that the term ‘disabled person’ is “too similar to derogatory disability language that places the label before the person” (Goodwin and Peers, 2012, p.187). Much recent literature uses the term ‘person with a disability’ (see Peers, 2009), and this is the term we adopt in this review.

According to Fitzgerald (2009) approximately 10 per cent of the world’s population experience disability, although she acknowledges that such a global estimate is based on the partial data available. It should also be acknowledged that within specific national contexts there are differing measures of what constitutes disability (Purdam, et al., 2008). For example, the 2011 Census gives a figure of 32 per cent of the NI population suffering from a ‘long-term health problem or disability’ (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2012), whereas a survey of the prevalence of disability and activity limitations amongst adults and children revealed that 18 per cent of the population were experiencing some form of disability (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2007). For the latter survey, to identify what constituted a person with a disability, the World Health Organisation’s ‘International Classification of Functioning Health and Disability’ was used (<http://www.int/classifications/icf/site/icftemplate.cfm>). The results indicated that 21 per cent of the adult population and 6 per cent of children experience at least one form of disability. Sport NI (2011b) statistics reveal that:

- 40 per cent of households include at least one person with a disability
- The incidence of disability increases with age with an incidence of 60 per cent amongst those aged over 75
- There are over 219,000 deaf and hard of hearing people, 47,000 blind or partially sighted

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people and 35,000 wheelchair users

- There are over 33,000 people with a learning disability
- 81 per cent of people with a disability never participate in sport
- Only 23 per cent of people with a disability achieve the recommended amount of weekly physical activity (30 minutes, 5 days a week) compared with 35 per cent of the population.
- Just 2 per cent of people with a disability spend 30 minutes 5 days a week engaged in moderate intensity sporting activity.

Research suggests that the attitudes and motivations of people experiencing disability, particularly self-consciousness and low levels of confidence, are influential in their decisions about whether to participate in sport, with those experiencing disability regularly feeling unable to ‘fit in’ at sports facilities and also lacking confidence to ask for help and assistance when at these facilities (Dowling et al., 2012). Many people experiencing disability are reliant on others, and some require personal support. Those without such support are likely to feel excluded from participation in almost all sporting activity (Shields et al., 2012).

The challenges of access to sports facilities, in relation to design and layout and the availability of appropriate equipment, have been highlighted, with some 71 per cent of those experiencing disability being excluded from participating in sport because of accessibility issues relating to facilities and equipment (Howie et al., 2012). Haycock and Smith (2011) note that although currently inclusion is vigorously promoted as a key educational policy objective of government, the physical exclusion of many pupils from several aspects of Extra-Curricular Physical Education programmes and the existence of ‘different kinds of provision’ may be reinforcing negative differences between disabled and non-disabled students. They argue that this exclusion, usually based on accessibility issues, reinforces negative differences between disabled and non-disabled young people.

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It should be noted that campaigning disability sports groups have been recognised as a positive factor in terms of increasing personal confidence, helping to instil a sense of personal identity and, in particular, lobbying for accessible facilities (Dowling et al., 2012). Indeed, Sport NI acknowledges “the need to make facilities accessible for people with disabilities, particularly with respect to changing rooms” (Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, 2010, p. 77). All sporting facilities tend to lack specialist staff who understand the needs of those experiencing disability and who can facilitate their involvement in activities (Stennett, 2009; Mahy et al., 2010).

In NI, the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure (2010) identified the cost of participating in sport as a barrier for those experiencing disability, as they often require specialist equipment and additional staff support. For example, wheelchairs users may require a sports chair, and/or another person to accompany them or undertake the sport with them. The issue of transport can also be a barrier to participation in terms of the availability of transport to sporting venues (Dowling et al., 2012), in that, those experiencing disability may not be able to access transport independently and/or are reliant on others. This can present a problem in relation to the competing demands and time constraints of caregivers/helpers (Barr and Shields, 2011).

The governing bodies within sport remain segregated between abled and people with a disability. Most notably, the International Olympic Committee and the International Paralympic Committee remain two separate organisations. Likewise in NI, Disability Sport NI operates as a separate body from Sport NI. Currently, 25 sports have representative disabled committees or associations, with some 100 clubs affiliated to Disability Sport NI. These clubs consist of sports clubs and groups, special schools and adult centres who receive support from Disability Sport NI to deliver sports to those experiencing disability.

Media coverage, which has the power to create and sustain positive perceptions of disability sport



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participation, is by any measure underachieving in this area. Media coverage of disability sport is restricted to competitive sports at national and international levels, thereby communicating a message and perhaps creating the impression that disability sport is only for those at the elite end of the spectrum (Nixon, 2007). Despite this, at an international level, media coverage has helped to raise the profile of the Paralympic Games (Blauwet, 2007; DePauw, 2012). For example, 7.7 million UK residents watched television coverage of the 2012 London Paralympic Games (BBC, 2012b). This has had definite advantages, in that “media coverage of the Paralympic Games has led to an increased awareness of opportunities for sport participation for individuals with disabilities and, with it, the adjustment of norms regarding expectations for exercise as a component of preventive health” (Blauwet and Willick, 2012, p. 851). At the same time, we should be aware that there is a double-edged sword to this media coverage (Purdue and Howe, 2012). As expressed by Collins with Kay (2014):

“For sport, the TV coverage of the Paralympics and of wheelchair sports people in world-famous marathons has made disabled sport an accepted element of sport overall; but even this can reify the trained athletic body over the average recreational one” (p.141).

Francis (2005) draws attention to the differences between the two principal movements in sport for people with disabilities. He notes that in the Paralympic movement “the goal is to develop highly competitive, highly visible, and economically viable sporting events for elite athletes with disabilities” (Francis, 2005, p. 130). The Special Olympics “by contrast, emphasize the self-development of the individual athlete... the result is that athletes are encouraged to improve in competition against those who have had very similar achievements” (p.131). Thus, depending on how it is organised and the philosophy underpinning it, sport for people experiencing disability has the potential to foster both inclusion and individual health and well-being (Right to Play, 2008). This can be achieved in two ways. Firstly, by changing community perceptions of those experiencing disability, which will involve reducing stigma and discrimination by increasing the awareness, knowledge and acceptability of disability sport. Secondly, by changing individual

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perceptions of how those with a disability view themselves and encouraging them to fulfil their true potential. Participation in sport by those experiencing disability can help to reduce stigma, facilitate increased social contact and foster a sense of independence (Right to Play, 2008).

There has undoubtedly been a politico-philosophical sea-change in the way ‘disability’ is framed. Patterson and Hughes (2000), argue that disability has “been transformed from an individual or medical problem into a civil rights issue” (p.30) which means it is becoming conceptualised “not as an outcome of physical impairment but as an effect of social exclusion and discrimination” (p.35). Brittain (2004) argues this has had a significant influence in disability and sport scholarship; he notes that the introduction “of the social model of disability has attempted to move the spotlight of research away from the medical model theories of disability toward an investigation of the impacts of societal perceptions of disability upon people with disabilities” (p.429). The battle for equity for disabled citizens was strengthened by the ratifying of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by the UK Government in June 2009, which introduced a legally binding requirement to ensure that discrimination against people with disabilities is eradicated. It is also clear that participation in sport has many benefits for people with a disability (Yazicioglu et al., 2012). The key task now for public policy formation in sport is to catch up with these profound philosophical and legal changes that have occurred in respect to understanding disability, sport and inclusion.

### **2.3.7 Sport and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people<sup>3</sup>**

A major study depicting the everyday life of young (average age 23 years) LGBT people and their experiences of discrimination collated the personal accounts of 754 individuals from 37 countries

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<sup>3</sup> Although in this report we maintain a distinction between LGB and transgender people, LGBT remains a widely used term in academic and policy literature and thus in this section we follow this convention.

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across Europe. In the Introduction to this report, Takács (2006) highlighted the need for greater attention to this group, pointing out that “Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people continue to face discrimination and exclusion across Europe in all spheres of life” (p. 6). One of the findings from this study was that the young people experienced discrimination in sport, particularly in terms of being excluded from sports teams on the basis of stereotypical assumptions about their sexuality. For example, two respondents commented (p. 64):

I was kicked out of our (female) football team. The trainer’s comment was if an apple starts to rot, it is not enough to cut out the rotten bit but you should throw away the whole apple so I was kicked out together with two other lesbian team members (Hungary F23).

Some friends of mine, who were taking part in an inter-mural soccer tournament decided not to let me take part in it as they figured, I would not be a good soccer player. I felt offended as I was the only male friend of theirs who was not invited to play. I certainly felt it had something to do with me being gay, as if gay males would not be able to play soccer! (Slovakia M27).

However, the areas of sexuality and transgender in relation to sport are under-researched and arguably little understood by policy makers. Cunningham (2012a) illustrates how, while there is considerable research on areas such as race and gender, “examinations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons (LGBT) have lagged behind considerably” (p. 5). In particular, there is a dearth of research into the experiences of transgender people in sport, since, as Lucas-Carr and Krane (2011) have shown, they “tend to be lumped in with other sexual minorities under the LGBT umbrella” (p. 533). Furthermore, Caudwell (2012) argues that any “focus on transgender and sport ... highlights the taken-for-granted assumption that a coherent LGBandT collective exists and that transgender is a fixed, definable and agreed upon category” (p. 1). She goes on to suggest that “the established, dominant and well ‘defined gender binary’ reduces the possibilities for new sporting configurations and therefore potentiality for transgender people’s participation” (p. 15). Likewise, Ravel and Rail (2007) have demonstrated how earlier research into LGBT people and sport was rooted in the supposition that sexuality and gender were permanent, unchanging states, whereas more recent studies have employed, inter alia, poststructuralist and queer theories to investigate the

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experiences of this population. These theories do not perceive sexuality in terms of hegemonic categories but rather regard it as fluid and changing. In her review of the field, Lenskyj, (2013) emphasised the need to move away from former stereotypes which have prevailed in relation to LGBT people, to develop “an *intersectional* analysis that explores how gender, social class, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and other identities intersect within sporting contexts and in the broader society” (p. 141).

As we have seen throughout this review, sport reflects many of the attitudes prevalent in society and at times seems to even lag behind general societal changes. For example, Symons et al. (2010, p. 7) show that in sport in general, “sexuality is mostly coded as heterosexuality and there is little positive room for alternate sexualities. Generally, transgression from these norms around gender and sexuality is punished in sport, and particularly in team sport.” For instance, Paechter (2003) suggested that in some sports successful young women are often classified as being lesbians and are frequently the subject of homophobic abuse as a result. Indeed, a common stereotype of lesbians is that they are regarded as being more ‘masculine’ than heterosexual women and therefore more likely to play ‘masculine’ sports (Elling and Janssens, 2009). However, it is also the case that recent research among UK male athletes has shown a decline in homophobia in relation to having a gay teammate (Bush et al., 2012).

A literature review of sexual orientation in sport, commissioned by Sport Scotland, Sport NI, Sport England and UK Sport, concluded that there is a lack of data and evidence in this area, so that issues can easily “be ignored or remain hidden” (Brackenridge et al., 2008, p.10). Indeed, their report suggests that prejudice, homophobia and discrimination are experienced by members of the LGBT community in sport participation. However, despite awareness among stakeholders of these issues, the lack of policy and strategies operating to offer expertise in this area is noticeable: “there is no clear leadership on this issue and some Government positions appear to be hesitant to take the

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stand on policy” (Brackenridge et al., 2008, p.10).

There is evidence that the experiences of LGBT students at university are quite positive in relation to sports activities, in that:

“there are many LGBT students who are active in sports and enjoying a positive experience. Sports teams and societies can be welcoming to LGBT students and a positive space where LGBT students feel accepted (National Union of Students, 2012, p. 25).

However, this NUS study also found that there were barriers to inclusion in sport for LGBT students. The main identified barrier was the perception of a macho culture inherent in certain sports (such as rugby or football), replete with homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic attitudes. This was linked to earlier experiences of such attitudes at school. Facilities such as shared changing rooms and showers were also highlighted as barriers to participation.

In the Australian context, Symons et al. (2010, p. 6) found that, “There is very little direct empirical research on the sport experience of LGBT Australians. Whilst other disadvantaged groups in the Australian sport context have been recognised in the research and policy agenda, the existence, experiences and needs of LGBT peoples within sport have largely been ignored.” As a result, they conducted an online survey in the state of Victoria, of people over 18 years old who identified as LGBT. Of the 307 people who responded, almost half of those involved in mainstream sports had not ‘come out’ to anyone. Symons et al. found that some 42 per cent of participants had been subjected to verbal homophobia, while 3 per cent had experienced a physical homophobic assault. Women reported being actively discouraged from participation in sport through being insulted, sexually assaulted, called lesbians or told they could not play. Men had their gender and heterosexuality called into question when they played badly, being called sissies, girls, or gay. As a result, gay men felt they had two options, either to pose as heterosexual or to quit the sport. Respondents who were not out in their sport described their environment as being “unsafe,

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unpredictable, isolating and intimidating” (p. 7). Two areas that were viewed as being particularly problematic were coaching sport (which was regarded as being especially fraught with risk), and sporting involvement in smaller, rural towns. In relation to respondents who were openly out in their sports, three main themes emerged, for both male and female respondents, with respect to facilitators of inclusion: having other LGBT members openly out in the sports club to offer support and affirmation, the presence of a friendly and welcoming environment for all club members, and having confidence and positive self esteem regarding one’s sexual and sporting identity.

Elling and Janssens (2009) carried out a research survey in Holland in which 594 self-identified homosexual and bisexual women and men aged between 18-65 years were compared to a matched sample of heterosexual men and women. They found that gay men were underrepresented in traditional ‘masculine’ team sports and mainstream club sports and overrepresented in commercially based fitness-centre sports. Elling and Jansen argue that one reason for this is idealised body-image, in that, “The overrepresentation of gay men in fitness centres and their stronger health and appearance oriented motivations are not only affirmative to stereotypical images of ‘femininity’, but are simultaneously compatible with the normative muscular (young) ‘masculine’ body in the commercialized gay night life scene” (p.82). However, most non-heterosexual women and men also identified mainstream sports where they were able to participate without being unduly confronted with homonegativity and heteronormativity. Another finding was that many of this group were reluctant to join ‘counter spaces’, such as LGBT sports organisations, and displayed a degree of compliance with heteronormativity.

With regard to the sports experiences of transgender people, Whittle et al.’s (2007) study of transgender people in London found that 47 per cent of respondents did not use sports centres because they were afraid that they would not be allowed to use the changing facilities of their choice. In fact, 6.5 per cent of respondents reported that they had actually been asked to use toilet or

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changing facilities different from their acquired gender. Other research in Lambeth Borough Council also found that transgender respondents were reluctant to use the local recreational facilities. This reluctance was “exacerbated by the fact that fitness classes etc. are often single gender and trans people fear the reception they will get if they enrol” (Keogh et al., 2006, p. 38). One UK study of transgender people in competitive sport also identified the issue of prejudice and discrimination. Caudwell’s (2007) ethnographic research on a lesbian-identified football team playing in England highlighted transphobic attitudes toward a transgender player in a rival lesbian football team. She found that the player’s goal-scoring ability was interpreted within an essentialist narrative about sex, in which being born as a man gave her an “unfair advantage” (p. 192)

According to research by the Equality Network in Scotland (Smith et al., 2012), 79 per cent of 115 transgender respondents agreed that transphobia was a major barrier to participation in sport for transgender people, while 80 per cent had witnessed or experienced transphobia in sport. The most popular suggested responses to the problem were a high profile anti-homophobia/transphobia campaign and diversity training for sports facilitators/coaches/participants. Other identified barriers were the lack of changing facilities that meet the privacy needs of transgender people and the difficulties encountered when entering competition.

It is clear that more research is needed into the views and experiences of LGBT people in relation to sport, across different countries, cultures and sports contexts. In his recent edited text on *Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Sport*, Cunningham (2012b) summarised the present situation: “while strides have been made and attitudes toward LGBT individuals have largely improved over time, there is still work to be done ... [towards] ... making sport a context characterized by LGBT equality” (p. 76). Kauer and Krane (2010) emphasise the concept of *inclusive excellence* for people of all sexual and gender identities. This involves having diversity as a key team goal and ensuring that managers, coaches, fellow team members, etc. follow inclusive best practice principles. In their

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research review, Symons et al. (2010) identified positive/inclusive and negative/exclusive climates faced by LGBT people in sports clubs. It is worth summarising here their main features of an inclusive climate:

- The organisation's formal written policies encompass gender identity and sexual orientation.
- Administrators ensure that these policies are known by members and influence the climate of the organisation in an inclusive way.
- Administrators and coaches ensure that all aspects of the environment are safe and inclusive for LGBT members.
- Staff training and development programmes and team meetings include the subject of homophobia and examine the needs of LGBT people and how these can best be met.
- LGBT members and staff feel able to be as 'out' as they wish to be.
- Anti-gay behaviour by staff or members is swiftly and firmly dealt with through established disciplinary procedures.
- LGBT members and staff feel able and welcome to bring their partners to social events.
- Administrators and coaches openly value diversity and actively support LGBT members and staff.
- Sexual orientation and gender identity are not taken into consideration when making decisions about team selection or coaching.

### **2.3.8 Sport and ethnic minorities**

The intersection of sport and race, like sport and nationalism, has emerged as a significant field of study. Carrington (2013, p. 380) observes: "sport engenders national conversations about race, discrimination, opportunity, and identity that would otherwise not take place, and as such,



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understanding the sports-race-society nexus is of increasing importance to sociologists and other social scientists.” Although little is known about the experiences of ethnic minorities in NI with regards to sport and leisure, in Britain and Europe growing multiculturalism has stimulated a plethora of studies examining the experiences of sport of non-white communities in their adopted countries, the barriers such communities may face, and the potential of sport to advance integration.

A systematic review conducted for the UK Sports Councils (Long et al., 2009) of research on Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups and sport in the UK highlights that BME participation in sport is considerably lower than average, and outlines commonly-identified barriers. Firstly, there is a correlation between BME groups and lower socio-economic status, thus, as we have explored, creating a significant obstacle to sports participation. Secondly, there is a relatively low number of BME sports coaches which, the authors note, “is likely to lead to a qualitative void in understanding the needs of populations outside the dominant group” (p. 34). Thirdly, BME communities can suffer from a lack of information about sports opportunities. Fourthly, numerous studies identify that BME groups experience racism in various sports in the UK.

Detailed data on the attitudes of ethnic minority groups towards sports and physical exercise have been reported in a number of important qualitative studies commissioned by public bodies. Though dated, their key findings remain pertinent. Research conducted for Sport Scotland in 2001 based on 40 interviews (10 each of Black African/Caribbean, Chinese, Pakistani and Indian ethnicities) found that barriers specific to minority ethnic groups included: lack of information, sometimes related to language difference; an expectation of discrimination due to experiences of exclusion in other contexts; experiences of racism; experiences of discomfort in white-dominated facilities; feelings that people would expect them to be poor performers at certain sports not associated with their ethnicity, such as Asians and football or Chinese and rugby; cultural and religious expectations, particularly relating to Muslim women and married Indian women; and, long work hours (Scott

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Porter Research, 2001). Importantly, this study emphasised that respondents' attitudes to sport varied greatly according to their level of affinity and adherence with their ethnic culture: 'security seekers' were closest to their culture and traditions, were least likely to play sport and would only do so when in safe, segregated settings; 'harmony seekers' sought to reconcile their sport with cultural and religious expectations; and, 'independence seekers' embraced Scottish culture, including sport.

Another study, for the Health Education Authority, conducted 22 focus groups with black and South Asian people in England (Rai and Finch, 1997), and identified very similar barriers to the Scottish research. Some respondents were uncomfortable being the only non-white person in gyms and other facilities; Muslim women mentioned that the requirement to wear revealing clothing and mixed-sex activities created barriers; some respondents had experienced overt racism in facilities, or were reluctant to exercise in public places for fear of racist attack. The view was also expressed that certain stereotypes of black and Asian people (such as Asian people being unfit for strenuous physical activity, or black people excelling at certain physical, competitive sports) created barriers, and that ethnic minorities could be excluded from sports associated with the middle and upper classes. The authors comment on how this situation can self-perpetuate: "[Respondents believed] that a limited range of sports appeared to be available to black people, which in turn became associated with black communities and hence became activities of interest among the black communities" (Rai and Finch, 1997: 68). A large scale 2003 study in Birmingham (summarised in Long et al, 2009) found similar issues to those outlined, as well as the perception that sports provision was better in white areas. It is important to point out that, in line with the findings of these studies, a review of research on the experiences of minority ethnic women in sport across Europe identified family responsibilities, racism, the lack of gender-segregated sport arenas, and lack of friends who participate in sport as key barriers, thus emphasising that it is women from non-white communities that are most excluded from sport (Walseth and Fasting, 2004).

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While the impetus behind research into ethnic minorities' experiences of sport has been a desire to further the social inclusion of these groups, some studies have investigated whether sport has in actuality helped to facilitate the integration of immigrant populations. Findings have been mixed. Bradbury (2010) studied ten BME amateur football clubs in Leicester. A history of racism had helped maintain segregation in football in the area. However, the author found that the BME clubs were an empowering cultural resource, a "symbolic marker for the construction and expression of specific ethnic and religious identities" (p. 35). Moreover, two of the clubs were multi-ethnic, opening the possibility of new, shared identities. Studies in Rotterdam, the Netherlands (Krouel et al., 2006) found that, firstly, meeting people of different ethnicity was far less of a motivation for playing sport than confirming one's ethnic identity, and secondly, high levels of aggression and inter-ethnic tension were reported in amateur football. Thus, the authors conclude: "Obviously, the assumption that mere contact in the sphere of recreational sport between members of different ethnic groups will automatically lead to more mutual understanding and to further meaningful exchanges at the cognitive level has to be rejected" (p. 176). The findings of Walseth's (2008) study of sport and ethnic integration in Norway were also varied. On one hand, her interviews (young, female, Muslim, second generation immigrants) demonstrated that sport could further integration by helping people build a social network and perhaps find work. On the other hand, the connections made tended to be across immigrant communities; contact with indigenous Norwegians was rare. An important obstacle was structural; Norwegian sports clubs tend to be based on locality and immigrant and indigenous communities live in separate areas, meaning that mixing was minimal.

These studies underline the fact that sport, by itself, is not a cure-all for social ills, and that it reflects social tensions as much as it transcends them. However, the potential remains for sport to *contribute* to the social inclusion of ethnic minorities, and to the fostering of positive relationships between ethnic groups in society. These issues are of increasing significance in NI since the number

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of ethnic minorities – although still small in Western European terms – is increasing. According to the 2011 census, the largest minority ethnic groups were Chinese (6,300 people; up from 4,100 in 2001), Indian (6,200; up from 1,600), and Other Asian (5,000; up from 200). Including the 1,300 Irish Travellers, 1.8 per cent (32,400) of people belonged to minority ethnic groups in 2011, more than double the proportion in 2001. However, this does not include people from the ‘A8’ countries of central and Eastern Europe which joined the EU in 2004. Almost two per cent (1.97) of people in NI reported having been born in one of the A8 countries (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2012). A 2013 report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Poverty and Ethnicity in Northern Ireland*, emphasised the disproportionate representation of ethnic minorities in low paid work. Moreover, although many immigrants report very positive experiences of neighbourliness in NI, “the evidence suggests that racist attitudes remain an important barrier to social inclusion for minority ethnic groups” (Wallace et al., 2013, p. 37). This suggests that sport and leisure is likely to be one of a number of areas in which ethnic minorities face barriers to inclusion.

This section has reviewed the international research on the engagement between specific groups associated with social exclusion – women and girls, those of lower socio-economic status, older people, people with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, and ethnic minorities – and sport, noting the specific barriers these groups are thought to face. In the next section, we examine efforts to break down these barriers, and to use sport as the means of social inclusion, in NI.

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## 2.4 Social inclusion through sport in NI

While this research project is concerned with current attitudes to exclusion/inclusion in NI and is not an intervention study per se, in discussion with the Project Steering Group it was decided that it would be useful to provide a synopsis of current initiatives in NI that have attempted to identify or break down barriers to exclusion and facilitate inclusion. Notwithstanding the historic divisions and persistent controversies within sport in NI, many sporting organisations have worked tirelessly – increasingly so in recent years – to make themselves more inclusive through what are referred to as ‘sport in the community’ initiatives or ‘sports-based interventions’ (SBIs) (Kelly, 2012). It is important to note that SBI’s in NI mirror, and in some cases have been modelled on, similar interventions in other divided societies (see section 2.2.4 above).

In NI, organisations, of course, do not always publicise the cross-community work or SBIs in which they are involved as they may not wish to draw attention to themselves and possibly negate any positive achievements. Similarly, often these initiatives do not receive a great deal of publicity, being mainly publicised on the websites of the organisations involved, and so few outside of the sporting arena may be aware of them. However, a number of higher-profile developments have also been introduced over the past few years, including sport-based peace-building, inter-sport partnerships, outreach activities and cultural changes within sports. Drawing on published sources, online information and details provided by sports body representatives who have been in contact with the authors as part of this research project, this section provides descriptions of some of the most significant SBIs.

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### 2.4.1 Sports based interventions in NI

#### *Football for All and Related Football Initiatives*

Football for All (FFA) is an on-going community relations campaign of the Irish Football Association (IFA), begun in 2000 with support from EU Peace funding in the wake of highly-publicised sectarian incidents at Northern Ireland internationals at Windsor Park. A report by the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL, 2004) had also charted the problems inherent in football as perceived by the fans themselves. In addition to eradicating manifestations of sectarianism from the game, the FFA campaign has also sought to promote women's football and disability football. It has been widely acclaimed, at home and internationally. Football for All is now the IFA official strapline and part of the organisation's logo, indicating the centrality of outreach and inclusion to the modernisation of the IFA. Independent, published evaluations of the campaign have reported considerable successes but with more work still to be done (Wilson, 2005; Wilson and Institute for Conflict Research, 2011; Helen Matthews Consulting, 2012).

Helen Matthews Consulting (2012) reported on the findings of a 2009 survey by the research company MillwardBrownUlster into the attitudes of fans and non-fans towards the IFA and the international game. The results reflected the significant change in attitudes which FFA was instrumental in developing, in that:

- 80 per cent of all fans in NI agreed that the IFA works for all sides of the community.
- 86 per cent of all fans agreed that the IFA had actively endeavoured to eradicate sectarianism from football.
- 96 per cent of international game attendees agreed that NI international matches had become more family-oriented.

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Helen Matthews Consulting concluded that “FFA activities have helped to bring back supporters, to increase the fan base and improve perceptions of the international game and the IFA, in business terms building a higher value brand” (p.12). There are significant bottom line benefits here. In their financial analysis of the benefits of FFA, Helen Matthews Consulting chart the following increases in IFA income between 2005 and 2011:

- Television and track income increased by 580 per cent from £615,700 to £3,571,919
- Domestic competition income increased from £298,708 to £825,690
- International match income increased from £834,530 to £972,298
- Income from commercial activities increased from £153,992 to £408,825
- Community Relations income increased from £38,111 to £180,487.

Helen Matthews Consulting argue that the FFA programme had a direct link to the IFA turnover of £6,037,802 in 2011: “With delivery costs of £176,410 in 2011 it is clear that the FFA project is delivering a significant return in which the programme costs represent 3 per cent of the £6,037,802 turnover directly attributable to the FFA programme” (p. 7). They also estimate the value of positive press exposure generated by Community Relations based articles in 2011 to be £253,673.

In relation to the latter point, the FFA campaign has entailed energetic engagement with the media, NI supporters clubs, other organisations and the wider public. A high level of communications activity was driven by the IFA’s Community Relations chief, Michael Boyd, including press releases, campaign DVDs and FFA wristbands. Community relations and disability awareness modules were incorporated into coach training. A sport-and-diversity strand in the citizenship education programme in NI post-primary schools was developed. The evaluation reports highlight a dramatically improved atmosphere at NI home internationals. This was evidenced when Sinn Féin Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Carál Ní Chuilín, attended a Northern Ireland game at Windsor Park in August, 2011. She described her visit as a “new experience” and said she had

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enjoyed the game. She further commented:

“In the past Windsor Park has been the scene of sectarian singing and chanting and I recognise the very real efforts that have been made by the IFA to tackle sectarianism at their matches. I hope my attendance contributes further to that effort. I look forward to working with the IFA in providing inclusion for all” (BBC, 2011a).

This was followed by a visit by Deputy First Minister and Sinn Féin member Martin McGuinness to Windsor Park in March 2012, when he was a spectator at the Linfield-Derry City Setanta Cup quarter-final game. He commented on his visit: “It's wonderful that Peter Robinson and myself are able to give leadership and clearly show that we want to see sport being unified and see community relationships built up through sport” (BBC, 2012c). Martin McGuinness and NI First Minister, Peter Robinson together then attended a testimonial game at Windsor Park in May 2012, between Manchester United and the Irish League, in honour of NI legend Harry Gregg.

However, the FFA evaluation reports also stress that progress at Irish Premier League level has been mixed, with sectarianism, racism, ‘masculinist aggression’ (including abusive behaviour) and national symbols continuing to be barriers to inclusion. Importantly, the 2011 report highlighted that such barriers were a major obstacle to financial viability for many Irish League Clubs who are in severe need of expanding their markets.

In relation to gender, FFA has presided over a significant increase in participation among women and people experiencing disability. The 2011 evaluation states that the IFA, with two dedicated full-time staff, is “ahead of any other association in these islands in this regard” (Wilson and Institute for Conflict Research, 2011, p.4). Some 450 young people – including some 50 girls – take part in coached activity every year via the special schools network. Women’s participation increased by 60 per cent between 2002 and 2010, with three quarters of secondary schools taking part in the girls’ coaching programme. Nonetheless, the 2011 evaluation also found that female footballers feel ‘second-class’ in terms of access to pitches and the priority given to developing women’s football



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by clubs. The culture of the game, on the pitch and in the boardroom, was perceived as highly masculine in character. The IFA has increased its investment in the development of girls' and women's football in the past ten years, including four full-time members of staff (three in development and a National Women's Coach) and this has resulted in increasing numbers of female players participating in the game (<http://www.irishfa.com/grassroots/girls-grassroots/>). FFA also supports the World United and Women's World United project, and the Belfast Street League for homeless persons initiative.

#### *World United and Women's World United*

World United (WU) is an intercultural football team set up in 2003 by FFA in partnership with the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) and the Northern Ireland Council for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS). It aims to “increase the participation of people from ethnic minorities in local football, and provide an environment free from racism, sectarianism and discrimination” (World United, 2013). The IFA has provided training and equipment and other support, and has helped to integrate World United players into existing leagues. Initially focused on asylum-seekers and refugees, WU now includes players from Somalia, Ivory Coast, Qatar, Portugal, Zimbabwe, Brazil, Poland and Iran. In a further important step towards inclusion, in 2010-2011, Women's World United was established.

Ballymena United FC has made particular outreach efforts to migrant workers in their area (Bell and Wilson, 2007). The Club organised Friday night football sessions for members of minority communities. They also arranged free English-language classes before these sessions, provided by the local further-education college. An Interstars FC team, mainly comprising Slovaks and Romanians, was formed to compete in the local Saturday amateur league. This had a spin-off as migrant workers were then drawn to Ballymena United games. Bell and Wilson (2007), in

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evaluating World United, highlight its undoubted successes but also argue that more could be done to welcome and encourage minority ethnic groups into local football. They also point out that in relation to this initiative: “much is transferable to Gaelic sports and rugby, which could equally find ways to establish cosmopolitan teams like World United” (p. 12).

### *Belfast Street League*

This is a five-a-side football league designed “to change people’s lives for the better through the power of football” (<http://www.nistreetleague.co.uk/2.html>). It is based on a model that has been established in other cities including London, Dublin and Glasgow. Beginning in February 2010, it is co-ordinated by Hosford House (the hostel of East Belfast Mission on the Lower Newtownards Road) and supported by FFA and other funders. The League is aimed at the homeless, ex-offenders, drug and alcohol dependent individuals, long-term unemployed, refugees and asylum seekers and other disadvantaged groups; most of the teams represent homeless hostels. It runs three times a year, for eight weeks at a time, in the Shaftesbury Recreation Centre on the Lower Ormeau Road (Belfast Street League, 2012).

A related FFA initiative here is Limestone United which involves two groups from a North Belfast Interface area which has often been the scene of rioting, deprivation and criminal activity, and has been identified as one of the top 10 Targeting Social Need areas (IFA, 2012). Limestone United has been running since 2008, and consists of male participants aged between 11-25 years old. The young people involved are ‘at risk of offending’, or have been involved in antisocial or criminal behaviour in the past. Limestone United has engaged with these groups and has attempted to encourage and foster the development of positive relationships not only between the young people from both sides of the interface, but also the community policing team in North Belfast who assist FFA in the coordination and running of the project. In a recent outreach initiative, Football For All

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brought Limestone United to Derry/Londonderry to explore the various cultural perspectives within the city. The trip included a visit to Derry City Football Club, a tour of the City Walls, a visit to the Apprentice Boys of Derry Museum and a game of football against Rosemount Resource Centre, who play in FFA's North West Street League (IFA, 2012).

### *Disability Football Development Strategy*

This IFA initiative is designed to give disabled people the opportunity to take part in football activities (<http://www.irishfa.com/grassroots/disability-football/>). There are 5 objectives in the Disability Football Development Strategy:

1. To raise the profile and awareness of Disability Football in NI
2. To increase the number of disabled performers participating in football activities
3. To improve the quality of training available to disabled performers
4. To establish and develop new and existing competition structures
5. To continue the development of performance pathways and opportunities for elite performers to excel.

The IFA runs two Regional Disability Football Leagues. The leagues are 5-a-side and cater for all abilities as there are different ability bands in each Region. The leagues are open to Disability Football Clubs, Adult Centres, Disability Organisations or Disability Groups that cater for learning and/or physical disability. The IFA has also developed coach education courses for those working with disabled footballers. The disabled groups focused upon include learning disability, physical disabilities, visual and hearing impairments.

### *Midnight Street Soccer*

Midnight Street Soccer (MSS) is a community football project for teenagers (male and female) that

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was developed by the North Belfast Play Forum in 2005 (Belfast Telegraph, 2007). Initially established to prevent sectarian youth-led violence in flashpoint areas of north Belfast, MSS now takes place throughout NI. Finals take place in the JJB Sport Soccer Dome in Dundalk. The project is designed to give young people who may otherwise be involved in anti-social behaviour a positive outlet for their energies. It aims to create friendships and build positive relationships across the communal divide and promote anti-sectarianism and a healthy lifestyle. In addition to the football leagues, the project also provides opportunities for leaders and young people to take part in accredited coaching qualifications.

For example, in one initiative within this scheme, in October 2012, some 50 young girls and boys aged 13-17 years old in Castlereagh examined the impact of racism in society during a MSS session funded by the Castlereagh Police and Community Safety Partnership. They received anti-racism and sectarianism training, and participated in a Futsal session delivered by the World United Intercultural team. Futsal is a mini-football game that Brazilian stars such as Ronaldo, Roberto Carlos and Denilson played when young. The young people learnt its history and rules and then participated in a game of Futsal (<http://www.irishfa.com/the-ifa/community-relations/item/7702/midnight-street-soccer-tackles-racism/>).

### *Academy North*

A pilot cross-community football apprenticeship scheme called ‘Academy North’ was launched in December, 2009. Cliftonville and Crusaders Football Clubs, in conjunction with North City Training, a member of Bryson Charitable Group, developed this sports and educational training programme as part of the Department for Employment and Learning Training for Success provision. At the launch of this initiative the then Employment and Learning Minister, Sir Reg Empey said, “It is programmes like this that are making such a contribution to addressing these

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problems in our community. Healing the division has been and remains at the centre of the Assembly's policy and requires action across a wide range of political, cultural, and socio-economic programmes.”

(<http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/media-centre/news-departments/news-del/news-del-december-2009/news-del-101209-academy-north-launched.htm>)

### *Teenage Kickz*

Teenage Kickz is a Derry/Londonderry-based project, led by former Derry City FC captain and current manager Peter Hutton, which emerged out of a football in the community initiative by Derry City FC. The project works in association with Derry City FC, thereby facilitating opportunities such as player appearances, payers taking part in coaching sessions, etc. (<http://teenagekickz.com/>). Beginning in 2008 and working mainly in deprived areas through self-referral by community leaders and youth workers, Teenage Kickz uses football and other sports to engage marginalised young people aged between 12 and 18 years, diverting them from anti-social behaviour and instilling positive attitudes to health, fitness and wellbeing. The organisation brings a portable pitch and floodlights to the location and runs programmes of usually eight weeks in length, mostly at weekends and at night. Teenage Kickz also runs an anti-sectarianism programme which brings together groups from both sides of the community and both sides of the border. Each of four groups of young people visit and receive tours of the other groups' areas and play a football tournament in that location. In May 2013, Peter Hutton led a group of 36 young people to see Everton play; the Everton in the Community charity arranged for them to form a guard of honour for the players, see the game and receive coaching (Derry Journal, 2013).

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### *Old Firm Alliance Project*

This community led initiative was piloted by the Greater Shankill Partnership in 2008. Its primary aim is to build and develop community relations, by using football and associations with Celtic Football Club and Rangers Football Club as its tool. Funded through the Office of First and Deputy First Minister and Community Relations Council, the project provides opportunities for young people to socialise through playing football, while learning more about sport, and, specifically, how it can positively influence their lives and contribute to their health and well-being. It is hoped that the importance of football and its capacity for developing and contributing to the interpersonal skills of children and young people, when running in parallel with an educational message, can assist young people in making positive life decisions, being assertive and proud of who they are (<http://greater Shankill Partnership.org/programmes/sports-bcsdn/old-firm-alliance.html>).

In 2012 Active Communities, in collaboration with the Old Firm Alliance, and with support from the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, attempted to build on the positive relationship between Newington Youth Club and Crusaders Football Club. The aim of the project is to raise aspirations and offer positive progression pathways for the participants, while building unique links between both clubs. The project is targeting young people (16-17 years age group) within the clubs through a combination of personal and social development pathways, to provide a platform to build links with other football clubs throughout the UK and Ireland.

### *Glentoran FC Research*

Although not an intervention project, it is worth highlighting an initiative by Glentoran Football Club, who recently commissioned a community relations audit of their operation as part of their Respect Initiative. This initiative was set up to deliver a programme of activities that would address

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intercommunity prejudice. One of the aims of the audit was to consult, “key stakeholders on how Glentoran Football Club can work towards the achievement of a tolerant, inclusive football club, where underrepresented groups feel welcome” (Bruce and Galloway, 2011, p. 5). The main methods employed were interviews and focus groups with these stakeholders.

One key finding from the audit was the definite view from all respondents that change was required if Glentoran FC was to survive and thrive. These included aspects such as schools outreach, increasing accessibility for disabled persons, health and well-being promotion, dealing with sectarianism and racism, and embracing a range of groups including Catholic communities (in areas like the Short Strand), the Polish community and the female fan-base. The audit demonstrated that there was considerable goodwill from these groups towards the club, and that this should be built upon and developed. It also identified a range of concrete infrastructural steps that the club would need to take to ensure that such outreach is successful (e.g. making the Oval club ground more appealing for women and children through the introduction of suitable catering and toilets). This form of community relations audit would be useful for other sporting bodies to consider.

### *Belfast United Forum*

The Belfast United Forum brings together over 14 community groups and football clubs from across Belfast who are using football to promote positive Community Relations (<http://www.irishfa.com/the-ifa/community-relations/grassroots/>). The Forum organises joint projects, and those who attend the monthly meetings are able to share information and best practice around good relations in sport. The Belfast United Forum includes representatives from:

- World United
- The Belfast Community Sports Development Network
- Glentoran Football Club
- Midnight Street Soccer
- Belfast Street League
- The 174 Trust

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- Ardoyne Youth Providers Forum
  - PSNI Community Affairs
  - Limestone United
  - Co-operation Ireland
  - Concept Eleven
  - East Belfast Mission
  - Sport NI
  - The Loca Centre

### *GAA outreach*

In recent years the GAA has taken significant steps to become more amenable to all traditions. The high-profile removal of the ban on NI security force membership in 2001 has been followed by other bridge-building symbolic moments and cross-community outreach. The most senior figure in the GAA, Director-General Paraic Duffy, recently expressed a strong desire for a future where those from the unionist tradition would feel entirely comfortable in participating in the GAA. He pointed out that the GAA was actively involved in a range of outreach activities with people from a unionist background and stated that he “would want to see the GAA as a vehicle for building better cross-community relations” (Bogue, 2013, p.71). Likewise, Aogán Ó Fearghail, the Ulster GAA President pointed out that: “Ulster GAA is actively promoting Gaelic games to people from non-GAA backgrounds. Through these programmes Ulster GAA encourages young people from non-traditional GAA backgrounds to participate in our games, while also raising awareness of the association, helping to build good relations and using sport to break down barriers” (Clarke, 2012). Gaelic games are now offered in a number of state, or controlled sector, schools including Portora Royal in Enniskillen, Dungannon Royal, Limavady Grammar and Ashfield Boys' School in Belfast. This development has been paralleled by increased participation in rugby in Catholic schools in NI.

In February 2012, Danny Murphy, director of the Ulster GAA, made a significant statement of



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outreach when he said that his organisation – despite its long association with nationalism and republicanism – would attend “every event” in the following decade to remember the milestones that led to partition. He promised to attend commemorations of events symbolic to unionists such as the Battle of the Somme, the signing of the Ulster Covenant and the creation of Northern Ireland. Mr Murphy made his comments in an article for the Presbyterian Herald, written in response to the challenges to the GAA that were made by former Presbyterian moderator the Rev Dr Norman Hamilton when he addressed an Ulster GAA Club and Volunteer Conference in Armagh in October, 2011 (<http://ulster.gaa.ie/2011/10/presbyterian-minister-challenges-gaa/>). In his article, Mr Murphy said: “Finally as we enter a decade of commemoration I want to state emphatically that the GAA will play its part in ensuring that over the next 10 years each commemorative event is shown respect. I have in the past and I will again call for the next 10 years to become a decade of reconciliation where we educate each other to our different traditions and historical perspectives and if the GAA is invited it will send a representative to every event that takes place over the next decade”. He also asserted that the GAA was committed to “building a shared future and a better future for everyone on this island” (<http://www.community-relations.org.uk/about-us/news/item/956/ulster-gaa-leader-in-respect-pledge/>).

The Ulster GAA has met with representatives of the Protestant churches, Orange Order and unionist parties. There have also been ground-breaking symbolic, and indeed totemic moments, such as when Queen Elizabeth II was welcomed to the home of Gaelic games, Croke Park, in Dublin in June 2011 and Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader and NI First Minister, Peter Robinson was welcomed to a GAA match in Armagh in January 2012 by Ulster GAA President Aogán O'Fearghail. The deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness, who accompanied him to the game, said that the First Minister's attendance was, “another little bit of history...I think it's a brave step, but Peter knows the overwhelming majority of our people passionately want the peace process to proceed and are absolutely delighted when they see him and myself turning up at different events,

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maybe even events that they would never have expected either the two of us would support” (UTV, 2012). In fact, the then Sports Minister Edwin Poots had been the first DUP politician to attend a Gaelic football match in an official capacity at Pairc Esler, Newry, in January 2008 when he watched the McKenna Cup game between Down and Donegal. An invitation to attend the GAA fixture had been accepted by Mr Poots when he spoke at a GAA conference in October, 2007 (BBC, 2008). However, in terms of social exclusion, Mr Poots pointed out: “My only conditions were that the venue I would attend would not be named after a terrorist and that I would not arrive until after the Irish national anthem had been played. The reason for this was because I was making the point that these are the factors that dissuaded unionists from partaking in GAA” (News Letter, 2008). Members and leaders of loyalist organisations in NI have also attended an All-Ireland hurling semi-final at Croke Park at the invitation of the GAA (Brolly, 2013).

In another significant move forward, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) formed a Gaelic football team in 2002, a year after the GAA removed Rule 21, which banned members of the police and the Army from playing Gaelic games. When PSNI Constable Ronan Kerr was murdered by dissident republicans in Omagh in 2011, his GAA team, the Beragh Red Knights, and the PSNI, united at his funeral in an unprecedented and strongly symbolic show of solidarity to form a guard of honour and help to carry the coffin (BBC, 2012d). Also in relation to links between the GAA and the PSNI, senior Ulster GAA official Ryan Feeney broke new ground when he was appointed to the Policing Board in May 2011. While he was appointed to the role in his capacity as a ‘private citizen’ he stated: “I have support from the leadership at Ulster level and the central level of the GAA - they're very supportive of the decisions I have taken” (BBC, 2011b). Mr. Feeney is the first senior GAA figure to sit on the body.

Since 2008, the Ulster GAA has run the Cúchulainn Cup, which it describes as its “flagship” cross-community initiative. Teams of young people from towns across Ulster, drawn from both

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predominantly Catholic and predominantly Protestant schools, compete in a game of two halves – one of hurling and one of Gaelic football. The Cúchulainn programme “aims to use sport to build peace and reconciliation between communities across Ulster while also promoting Gaelic Games to those who would normally not have the opportunity to play the Games” (GAA, 2012). Teams have been established in Armagh, Belfast, Cavan, Enniskillen, Roe Valley, Derry/Londonderry, Coleraine and Monaghan.

At a local level, cross-community outreach has also been initiated by GAA clubs. For example, Michael Davitt’s GAA club, in the mainly nationalist village of Swatragh, organised a special concert to help raise funds towards the £60,000 required to replace the roof on Killelagh Church of Ireland church (Young, 2010). The Minister of Maghera and Killelagh parish the Rev Isaac Hanna said this fundraising helped to bring people together: “Several cross-community events have been held. Someone commented to me that there were people at those events who would never have dreamed of rubbing shoulders 10 years ago.” Club Chairman Liam McQuillan said the club was delighted to help with the fundraising effort, pointing out: “In the last two years we have been getting involved with the Church of Ireland in cross-community events. It’s a lovely wee church and it has been there for a long number of years and the people involved with our club would not like to see it closing because they are unable to afford a new roof.”

A recent survey by the Belfast Telegraph has revealed that the GAA programme of outreach seems to be paying dividends, with a growing number of Protestants supporting the view that GAA sports should be offered in state schools in NI. This poll showed that a total of 42 per cent of people of all religions thought that GAA sports should be offered, with just 23 per cent opposed. A breakdown along religious grounds demonstrated support amongst 27 per cent of Protestants, with 34 per cent opposed and 39 per cent having no opinion (Clarke, 2012). Clarke points out that “This reflects softening of Protestant and unionist feeling towards the GAA”.

In April 2012, the Department for Social Development's (DSD) Volunteering Strategy for NI awarded the IFA and GAA £350,000 for a joint volunteering project, 'Sport in the Community' (Belfast Telegraph, 2012c). Joint objectives include a sponsorship and marketing workshop, volunteering workshop, community relations event, open forum, volunteer development officer training, joint volunteering opportunities, and a joint annual Volunteer Awards event. As part of Sport in the Community, a half-day Good Relations Forum was hosted by the Ulster GAA and the IFA in October 2012, to explore the role of sport in developing good relations and contributing to peace-building, and to examine case studies of this in action. This event highlighted the good relations work being carried out by the joint IFA/GAA partnership as part of the three year Sport in the Community Project, and presented examples of both football and GAA clubs who were models of best practice in their local communities. Social Development Minister Nelson McCausland who opened the event said: "I welcome the opportunity to be here today to celebrate the joint work that is being done by the IFA and GAA as part of the innovative 'Sport in the Community' project, funded by my Department. This partnership working is providing opportunities for both organisations to share resources, skills and expertise in sport, and support in building volunteering capacity and community relations."

(<http://www.community-relations.org.uk/about-us/news/item/1205/mccausland-endorses-ifa-gaa-sport-in-the-community-initiative/>)

### *Yes We Can*

In 2010, Ulster Camogie and Ulster Hockey joined forces to launch 'Yes We Can', a unique peace and reconciliation 6-month programme that promotes engagement in sport while also supporting the development of positive and lasting friendships between young women, their leaders, and their

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Clubs, across the community divide. This initiative is part of the Play Fair programme, funded by the EU's Peace III Programme, for the Special EU Programmes Body by the CAN (Carrickfergus, Antrim and Newtownabbey) Peace III Partnership.

This cross community initiative involving three clubs, Bredagh GAC, St Endas GAC and Mossley Hockey Club, aims to help grow each sport by bringing in participants from non-traditional backgrounds. Whilst no systematic evaluation of the project exists, it has been reported that “girls are now participating in each other's sport” ([http://mossleyladies.hockeyclubwebsite.co.uk/pages/page\\_14983/Peace-III-Yes-We-Can.aspx](http://mossleyladies.hockeyclubwebsite.co.uk/pages/page_14983/Peace-III-Yes-We-Can.aspx)). At the launch, the then President of Ulster Hockey, Jennifer Patterson, emphasised the importance of the new relationship between camogie and hockey in NI: “This new relationship with Ulster Camogie has provided a significant new opportunity to engage with another Code and to make a real difference to both sports, both communities, and most importantly, to the lives of the young women involved. While the sticks and the rules may differ, we are keen to stress our shared vision for a peaceful and prosperous society.” (Newtownabbey Borough Council, 2010).

In 2012, ‘Stick at It’, an initiative building on the success of ‘Yes We Can’ was implemented across numerous Gaelic and hockey clubs in NI (Antrim Men's Hockey Club, Parkview Hockey Club, Mossley Ladies Hockey Club, Tír Na Nóg GAC and St Comgall GAC) involving activities and workshops aiming to promote better relations between communities.

### *Hockey Inclusion Group*

In 2010 the Irish Hockey Association (IHA) launched its Inclusion Group (<http://www.hockey.ie/inclusion>) to raise awareness and increase participation in hockey for those experiencing disability. The initiative has four main strategic objectives:

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- 1) Support: to put support documentation in place to guide and help clubs and schools to become more inclusive of players with disabilities.
  - 2) Training: to offer appropriate and up to date training to all involved with providing hockey to players with disabilities.
  - 3) Awareness and Education: to educate the hockey community on the value and benefits of including players with disabilities.
  - 4) Inclusion: to ensure the smooth running and operation of the Inclusion Group with appropriate resources

In 2011, the IHA Inclusion Survey aimed to assess how inclusive schools and clubs were. Of the 69 respondents across Ireland who participated in the survey, 34 per cent reported that their clubs had players with disabilities (33 per cent physical disabilities; 2 per cent wheelchair users; 28 per cent intellectual disabilities and 37 per cent behavioural disabilities) (IHA, 2011). The report concluded that, despite the IHA underestimating the percentage of people with disabilities engaged in hockey, the reasons for this level of involvement were mainly due to hockey being part of the PE curriculum in schools, and part of the after-schools programme. In comparison, 73 per cent of respondents said that their hockey clubs did not provide training for players with disabilities with another 19 per cent ‘unsure’. When asked what were the issues, problems or barriers to inclusion the top three responses were ‘lack of knowledge within the club’ (31 per cent), ‘lack of trained coaches’ (31 per cent) and ‘facilities not being suitable’ (24 per cent).

### *Girls Multi-Sport Activity Initiative*

In April 2012, Ulster Hockey, Ulster Camogie, Ulster GAA, Ulster Rugby and the Irish Football Association launched this initiative with the two-fold aims of, firstly, increasing opportunities for girls to participate in sport, and, secondly, raising the profile of female sport in the local media. The

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initiative provided Year 8 girls, from different schools across Belfast, with an opportunity to participate in and experience all five sports in what was designed as a fun and structured coaching environment. Role models from each sport participated in the coaching sessions. Speaking at the launch, Sheena Kelly from Ulster Ladies Gaelic said: “This event is a great opportunity for young girls to experience a variety of field sports that they may not have tried before. Not only will they be taking part in new sports, but they will also be meeting girls from other schools with different sporting and cultural backgrounds.” Likewise, Sara Booth, from the IFA added: “We hope that this event will raise the profile of the sports that we are all involved in and that the top quality players who will be in attendance will inspire and spur the girls on to get involved in all the sports on offer.” The initiative was organised by the Governing Bodies involved and was supported by Sport NI and Active Belfast (<http://www.irishfa.com/news/item/7260/girls-to-try-five-a-day/>).

### *The Female Sports Forum*

The Female Sports Forum was established in 2012, following collaboration between Ulster Hockey, Ulster Camogie, Ulster Ladies Gaelic, Ulster Rugby and the Irish Football Association. Funding for the initiative was provided by Sport NI. The two main aims of this Forum are to increase opportunities for females to participate in sport, and to raise the profile of females in sport within the media. In March 2013 a series of focus groups were held in Belfast, Cookstown and Derry/Londonderry, where the future shape and objectives of this Forum were discussed. One of those involved, the ladies Gaelic All Star Caroline O’Hanlon, who is also NI’s leading netball player and a doctor by profession, highlighted the health problems faced by young girls caused by high levels of obesity. She pointed out: “That has become a major issue for society, with huge human and financial cost implications, so I think investing in women’s sport and promoting it in a way which helps inspire more young girls to get involved would be contributing to the greater good” (Bullick, 2013, p. 63).

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### *Crossover Basketball*

Crossover Basketball is a basketball charity group that works with young people in Belfast and the greater Belfast area from different traditions and backgrounds, who might not have opportunities to participate in regular sport. A key aim of this programme is to reduce sectarianism and anti-social behaviour, and to develop the levels of skills and confidence of the young people (<http://www.sported.org.uk/in-your-area/northern-ireland/supported-projects/crossover-basketball>).

The programme works in partnership with local youth clubs and groups, and uses basketball as a ‘neutral’ sport in order to carry out community relations work with single identity communities in and around Belfast.

### *Peace Players International NI*

Peace Players International (PPI) is a sports-based peace-building organisation which works in South Africa, Cyprus, Israel-Palestine and (since 2002) NI. Since 2001 it has worked with over 50,000 young people in an attempt to overcome religious, social or ethnic divisions in their communities (Tuohey and Cognato, 2011). PPI-NI uses basketball – an historically neutral sport in NI (Bell, 2012) – to bring together young people from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds in order to develop friendship, acquire sporting skills, and learn about respect and tolerance. Activities include: primary school twinnings in which Protestant and Catholic school children come together in mixed groups for basketball and community relations sessions; community-based programmes for children and teenagers after school and at weekends; and, leadership development programmes.

A recent evaluation of PPI-NI found the organisation to be highly effective in achieving its aims (Bell, 2012). In this evaluation, a survey of P6 pupils found that 76 per cent had friends from the twinned school after the programme compared with 29 per cent before. Interviews with teachers



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highlighted a number of aspects of PPI-NI which were thought to be instrumental to its success, including:

- the neutrality of the PPI-NI's vehicle, basketball
- the perceived neutrality of the organisation itself, which was regarded as an “impartial and a neutral arbiter” (Bell, 2012, p. 4)
- the ‘safe space’ environment created by PPI-NI coaches which encourages young people to engage with one another and discuss sensitive issues
- long-term relationships with, and commitment to, schools
- opportunities for young people to progress to leadership/coaching roles after their involvement at school
- the community relations content of PPI-NI programmes which dovetails with citizenship education at school.

One of the conclusions from the evaluation of PPI-NI, which underlines the importance of its work, is that, “in many instances PPI-NI programme activity is the only method of interaction for young people in the school environment across the community divide” (Bell, 2012, p. 3).

### *A Game of Three Halves*

Rugby, soccer and Gaelic games (and PPI-NI) are linked through Sport for Change, a partnership aimed at furthering co-operation between the sports and contributing to good community relations. The major output of this relationship has been ‘A Game of Three Halves’. Running since 2010, the format was first developed by Paul Brown, Youth Co-ordinator at Knock Presbyterian Church in east Belfast, together with PPI-NI, as a cross-community initiative which would bring the three governing bodies together and offer children from both sides of the community the chance to experience rugby, Gaelic and soccer. A space is divided into three zones and the young people, in three groups, take it in turns to receive coaching in each sport. During breaks, trained facilitators

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talk to the young people about the importance of respect, looking after your health and friendship. A Game of Three Halves (GTH) has also been operative among teenage offenders in Hydebank Wood correctional facility in south Belfast (Peace Players International, 2013).

GTH is the format used for the Belfast Interface Games, cross-community sports camps for children aged 9-13 which ran throughout Belfast during the London Olympics with plans in place to continue in the future. This initiative was organised in partnership, by PPI, Ulster GAA, IFA and Ulster Rugby (BBC, 2012e). As part of this, in August 2012, some 100 children from interface areas of north, south, east and west Belfast participated in a competitive event at Seaview stadium (home of Crusaders FC). This involved collaboration between the IFA, Ulster GAA, Ulster Rugby and Peace Players International. Teams from each part of Belfast competed against one other in all three sports. For many children it was the first time that they had the opportunity to play another code or interact with children who would normally only play either rugby, Gaelic or football (<http://www.irishfa.com/the-ifa/community-relations/item/7553/sporting-interfaces/>). Each sport had a 'challenge station' where the young people were able to demonstrate skills they had acquired over the past three weeks. Celebrities from each sport participated in the event, as did three NBA stars.

### *Inline Hockey*

The Love Hockey Ireland project, launched in 2012, is part financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. It uses inline hockey to bring people together and break down barriers. The aim of the 3-year project is to deliver schools outreach, youth engagement and ethnic minority programmes to enhance community relations and aid the integration of ethnic minority groups into local communities. Inline hockey is a relatively new sport in NI and seems to be free from problems of division faced by other sports. The STAR

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(Skating Together Advancing Relations) project uses inline hockey as a medium for delivering good relations specific workshops and activities. At present this initiative focuses upon Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities in Armagh, Newry, Craigavon and Banbridge council areas (<http://lovehockeyireland.com/ethnic-minority/>).

Another hockey scheme is the Giants Community Foundation, a charitable not for profit organisation founded in 2008, whose mission statement is 'Integrating – Sport, Lives and Leisure' (<http://www.belfastgiants.com/archives/giants-community-foundation/>). It has links to the *Belfast Giants* professional ice hockey team, whose motto since its creation in 2000 has been: 'In the land of the Giants, everyone is equal'. As ice hockey is one of the few sports in NI without any sectarian history, and with fans from all community backgrounds, the *Belfast Giants* argue that they can play an important role in bringing communities together. The Giants Community Foundation offers a number of outreach cross-community and cross-border programmes (<http://www.belfastgiants.com/archives/giants-community-foundation/>). One of the Foundation's key objectives is "to develop activities to bring young people together and produce resources that use ice hockey to address social exclusion and bring people together from all social, ethnic, religious, racial and community backgrounds to develop respect, understanding and positive relationships".

### *Sport NI Programmes*

*Disability Mainstreaming Policy.* In 2006, Sport NI adopted its Disability Mainstreaming Policy (DMP), to promote disability sport. DMP recognised that:

- People with disabilities were not homogenous, and that some were especially vulnerable to discrimination
- Consideration needed to be given to the needs of people with disabilities across three levels

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- corporate, programme and project

- While the desired aim was to encourage organisations to work towards the end of ‘mainstreaming’, a ‘twin-track’ approach which included parallel provision may be appropriate in the short term under certain circumstances.

The aims of the DMP were:

- To ensure that people with disabilities are able to access and participate fully in the provision of facilities, goods, services and employment opportunities in sport and physical activity
- To ensure that people with disabilities, including young people and groups representative of those particularly vulnerable to exclusion, are fully consulted in future policy and programme development
- To ensure that the needs of people with disabilities influence and inform future policy and programme development
- To identify and implement positive action initiatives based on consultation and identified needs.

Specific tasks to be delivered by DMP were:

- To work with six specific Paralympic sports - athletics, basketball and swimming in Year 1; boccia and sailing in Year 2; and the IFA
- To support the network of Community Sports Development Officers active in NI
- To provide relevant training and education, information and advice to support the implementation of the DMP.

As referred to earlier in this Report, in partnership with DCAL, Sport NI developed ‘Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019’ (DCAL/Sport NI, 2009). This ‘Sport Matters’ report contained a number of disability specific targets including:

- The delivery of at least a 6 percentage points increase in sport and physical recreation

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participation rates among people with a disability

- That at least 100 NI athletes would attain medal success at the highest level in their sport including European, World and Olympic/Paralympic Level
- To have a minimum of 10 new or upgraded facilities to support NI player/ athlete development in Olympic and Paralympic sports.

Wharton Consulting conducted a review of the impact and effectiveness of the Disability Mainstreaming Policy (DMP) from 1 April 2006 to 30 September 2010 (Sport NI, 2011b). While the response rate to their survey of relevant organisations was disappointing the findings from this evaluation were positive. Wharton Consulting found that the DMP had fulfilled a very worthwhile purpose and had achieved a number of notable successes, namely:

- The creation of a unique platform from which the promotion and development of sport for people with disabilities could be effectively launched.
- The development of an action plan wherein:
  - Investment by Sport NI in disability sport increased by 44.69 per cent between 2006 and 2012
  - Disability Sports Northern Ireland (DSNI) was ‘kick-started’ as a delivery agency, from which a range of activities emanated to increase the participation of people with disabilities in sport and physical recreation
  - An equitable approach was encouraged within many organisations involved in the promotion and development of sport for people with disabilities.
- The fact that the voice of people with disabilities, especially through the medium of DSNI, is now routinely sought and listened to within sport.

However, the Wharton Consulting report also identified a number of issues that need to be addressed, including that:

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- There is no current data set which gives an accurate picture of participation either within disability sports as a whole, or within specific disability groupings
  - There is no commonly accepted definition of ‘disability’ within sport in NI, which in turn creates difficulty in delivering both the aims of the DMP and the monitoring of its effectiveness
  - There is no commonly accepted definition of, or agreement surrounding, the concept of ‘mainstreaming’. It is unclear whether the principle should be applied literally, or underpin a philosophical approach. Wharton Consulting recommended a strategy which emphasises that “there should be equality of opportunity, but not equality within provision” (p. 46).
  - Between 33 and 50 per cent of organisations surveyed who are involved in the promotion and development of sport for people with disabilities in NI, have still to embrace a fully equitable approach - for a variety of reasons.

*Community Sports Programme Evaluation.* In 2007 Sport NI commissioned staff from Sheffield Hallam University to conduct an evaluation of their Community Sports Programme (CSP) (Barlow et al., 2007). CSP was funded by DCAL and its aim was to initiate community sports development programmes in some of NI’s most disadvantaged communities. The main stated sporting objectives of the CSP were:

- To remove barriers to participation in sport within the community
- To create innovative opportunities to progress and to develop sporting skills and experience
- To provide new opportunities to move from recreational participation to competition or excellence
- To generate a network of skilled leaders and coaches
- To establish links between schools, sports clubs and the wider community.

Initially 40 communities were to be targeted but the loss of funding owing to the cessation of Exchequer Programme Funding in 2002 meant that the CSP had to be severely curtailed so that in

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fact only 6 communities could be involved. The evaluation comprised a combination of desk research on CSP, two focus groups and 28 telephone interviews with relevant stakeholders, and two case studies to illustrate best practice. In addition, a survey of participants was carried out to measure how the programme affected participants' self-esteem and social capital. While the precise results from this evaluation are often unclear as presented in the report, one of the main findings was that the two-year timescale of the CSP was too brief, since the stakeholders felt that, "community development work may take between five and ten years to reap tangible benefits" (p. 62).

*Get Active - Stay Active:* In 2006, the Board of Sport NI approved an investment of £4.2m from the Sport NI Lottery Fund to deliver the Sport in Our Community Programme from 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2010. Among the aims of this programme were to increase participation in sport and physical activity among underrepresented groups - specifically among people with disabilities and those who had not previously had a sustained interest in sport or physical activity. Sport NI made 34 investment awards to 30 organisations for a maximum of a four-year period. A total of 121,171 people participated in the programme.

FKB Consulting and Dennis McCoy Consulting were appointed in May 2010 to conduct a Final Impact Review of the programme (Sport NI, 2011d). As part of this review they conducted interviews and focus groups with key personnel and carried out a survey. One of the main conclusions from their evaluation was that: "the programme has reached out and engaged with young and old, people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups and has been able to provide a wide range of activities to appeal to those who previously did not participate in sport and physical activity" (p. 6). However, despite the success of the programme, a key issue highlighted in the evaluation was that of sustainability, in that some of the projects subsumed within the programme had been unable to identify or secure further funding to maintain their operation.

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In the context of the current research project it is useful to consider the following parts of this programme, which focused upon older adults, females and people with disabilities.

*Get Active - Stay Active: Older Adults.* This initiative targeted an increase in participation in sport and physical activity among older people. One of the aims of the Sport in Our Community programme was to offer innovative projects that would result in an increase in participation in sport and physical activity among older people. The programme was successful in encouraging increased participation by older people. Of the 121,171 people who took part in Sport in Our Community projects over its 4-year life-span, 6 per cent were aged 45 or over. In 2006/07 the number of people over 45 who participated in the programme was 827 but by 2009/10 this number had increased to 2,834.

*Get Active - Stay Active: Women and Girls.* As with the ‘older adults’ initiative, females were targeted as part of the delivery of the Sport in Our Community programme from 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2010. One of the aims of the programme was to offer innovative projects that would result in an increase in participation in sport and physical activity among females. The programme was successful in this regard. Of the 121,171 people who took part in Sport in Our Community projects over its 4-year life-span, 44 per cent were female. In 2006/07 6,755 females participated in the programme but by 2009/10 this number had increased to 17,937.

*Get Active - Stay Active: Disability Sport.* As with the ‘older adults’ and ‘women and girls’ initiatives, here people with a disability were targeted as part of the delivery of the Sport in Our Community programme from 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2010. One of the aims of the programme was to offer innovative projects that would result in an increase in participation in sport and physical activity among people with a disability. The programme was successful in increasing participation. Of the 121,171 people who took part in Sport in Our Community projects over its 4-year life-span, 6 per cent were people with a disability. In 2006/07 551 people with a disability



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participated in the programme but by 2009/10 this number had increased to 2,421.

*Active Communities* is an accredited Sport NI lottery-funded initiative (£13.5 million investment over 5 years) that seeks to employ, deploy and train a network of full-time and part-time sports coaches to deliver activities in community and club settings across NI. Its primary aim is to increase participation in sport and physical recreation. Through this scheme, Sport NI is working in partnership with the district councils to provide opportunities for over 100,000 people to become and remain active. This initiative targets under-represented groups within the community, namely children and young people, older people, females, and those with a disability, in different contexts (school, club and community settings). Active Communities has provided a network of 110 coaches and leaders to deliver their programmes, with the first of these being employed in April 2010. During 2010-11 Active Communities created opportunities for 48,344 people to participate in sport and physical recreation, including 56 per cent women and girls, 12 per cent with a disability and 9 per cent older people (Sport NI, 2011e).

A preliminary evaluation of Active Communities (between April 2010 and March 2011), in which 54,850 people participated, revealed that the programme was achieving its aim of increasing participation in sport and physical recreation across NI. Specifically, prior to Active Communities operating, 67 per cent of young people and 23 per cent of adults participated in sport and physical recreation at least three times per week. Following the implementation of the initiative these figures increased to 80 per cent and 38 per cent respectively (Sport NI, 2010-11).

### *Parallel Success*

Following the success of the London Paralympic Games, DSNI and Athletics NI launched their Parallel Success initiative, which aims to encourage people experiencing disability to take part in

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athletics (<http://www.athleticsni.org/Development/Parallel-Success>). This scheme is specifically targeted at those with physical, sensory or learning disabilities. The preparation of young athletes aged 11-18 year olds to compete at the next Olympic Games in Rio (in 2016), provides opportunities to take part in more competitions at national and international levels.

### *Belfast Community Sports Development Network (BCSDN)*

BCSDN was set up as a Company with Charitable Status in October 2006. It has 8 Directors, representing Community Regeneration Organisations and Community Managed Multi Sports Facilities, who work mainly within areas of social and economic deprivation across Belfast. BCSDN draws on the professional skills of paid and voluntary people working in the field of community sports (<http://greatershankillpartnership.org/sports-bcsdn.html>). It enables community sports in Belfast to articulate and endorse a strategic approach to the development of sport and community regeneration. It provides management, support, mentoring and guidance to development officers, clubs and community organisations enabling Belfast wide programmes to be implemented, while complementing local delivery.

BCSDN aims to:

- 1) Educate the general public as to the benefits, including health, personal development, education and social inclusion, of the availability of community sports opportunities.
- 2) Promote, support and develop the work of voluntary sector community sports organisations for all or any purpose deemed to be charitable and in particular the advancement of education, social inclusion and the improvement of health.
- 3) Act as a forum for the exchange of information between organisations to facilitate the development of a strategic approach to community sports development and presenting the views of providers and beneficiaries to policymakers and funders.

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- 4) Deliver and assist in the delivery of education, training and development to sports coaches and leaders, committee members, volunteers and administrators.
  - 5) Promote the development of sporting events, competitions and activities.

‘Our Space Project – Cultural Diversity through Sport’ was delivered by BCSDN over the period March 2010 to June 2011 (with an investment of £266,400 from Belfast Peace III Partnership). The project comprised five key initiatives and activities aimed at children and young people, using sport as a tool for establishing good relations. For example (BCSDN, 2011, p.3):

- Wildcats (Activ8) multi-skills clubs: an initiative targeting 5-11 year olds to develop their skills for sport through fun and enjoyable activity.
- STARS (Sport Taster Activity Roadshows): twinned school programme which provides opportunity to try four different sporting activities, i.e. handball, orienteering, quick cricket and basketball, through delivering sport taster sessions at primary schools.
- The Sheer SKILLS school and community programme: targeting under employed individuals to become coaches and leaders, with an aim to provide a lasting legacy for the city and sports delivery.
- Youth Diversionary Activities: numerous bespoke and community interventions (i.e. Belfast Street League) which demonstrate the social and community capital that can be developed through meaningful engagement.
- Cross City/Cross Border wide: a series of events to showcase the work of BCSDN, their universal appeal and influence in community sports across Belfast, but also as a model of best practice.

An evaluation of the Our Space Project, based on participation rates and qualitative participant case studies, and collected at the time of engagement in these initiatives, concluded that sport is an effective mechanism for the development of intra/inter community relations and social capital (BCSDN, 2011).

WISPA, a cross-community project, develops pathways for women across Belfast to become involved in structured physical activity, health awareness, personal development and peer education programmes. WISPA's main focus of work is to increase the opportunities for women to participate in community based programmes which address their needs and fitness levels. Specifically, WISPA delivers physical activity programmes (i.e. aerobics, dancercise and zumba) while distributing health-related information on healthy eating and smoking cessation as well as reinforcing the benefits of increased participation in physical activity. The programmes are tailored to suit the individual needs of the women involved, aiming to identify and remove barriers to participation, such as cost and location of facilities (<http://greater Shankill Partnership.org/full-site-map/community-links/86-women-in-sport-a-physical-activity-wispa.html>).

### **2.4.2 Evaluating sports based interventions**

In evaluating the effectiveness of SBIs it is important to recognise at the outset that such initiatives on their own cannot effect large-scale changes in cross-community relationships. In their review of sport in post-conflict societies, Dorokhina, et al (2011, p. 16) point out that:

“it is too much to expect sporting events to have an impact on social relations without the support of other contextual actors, such as local and national political parties and social partners. Sport should, in other words, be only one part in a much broader web of actors dealing with the larger social problems of the targeted group”.

Thus, SBIs are just one piece of the jig-saw that will hopefully build to the overall shape of a more peaceful and harmonious society. Without the active and positive involvement and support of the entire panoply of educational, political, governmental, community and other agencies, the effects of SBIs will be limited. Having said this, it is important that the precise impact of SBIs should be

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evaluated, especially given that significant sums of (usually tax-payers') money are invested in such initiatives.

We will examine the issue of longer-term, depth, evaluation of SBIs shortly. But another factor that needs to be recognised here is that there are considerable difficulties inherent in organising cross-community SBIs in NI. These interventions often attempt to bring together groups from across sectarian interfaces that have rarely, if ever, interacted with those from the 'other' side. Given the divisions, hostility and violence that have scarred these communities, this can be a challenging, difficult and indeed dangerous task for the organisers, especially since the divisions in NI have actually deepened in recent years (Brown, 2010; O'Donnell and Hargie, 2011; Cochrane, 2013). This means that even successfully implementing a cross-community initiative can be a substantial achievement. Against this backdrop, it is understandable that the main focus of SBI organisers in NI may well be on implementing and sustaining the initiative. Indeed, one of the criteria used by Sugden (2010) to measure the effectiveness of an SBI is if it leads to larger and more ambitious cross-community schemes.

From the initiatives reviewed in this section, it is clear that there is considerable SBI activity on the part of sporting and sports-related organisations in NI aimed at embracing diversity, fostering greater inclusivity in a wide range of sports and reducing factors that may cause exclusion. However, while there is definite determination and goodwill on the part of many sports-related bodies in implementing these initiatives, what is not always clear is exactly how effective their efforts have been. In line with research from other settings, we can find little evidence of systematic, rigorous, long-term evaluations having been conducted for SBIs in NI.

Those evaluations that have been conducted into SBIs in NI have tended to employ one of four main measures. Firstly, participation statistics. These may be all that is required if the objective of

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the SBI is simply to increase the participation of a particular target group. However, in general, participation rates do not in themselves provide any depth of insight into the effects of participation. Secondly, interviews or focus groups. One problem here is that often the construction of the thematic content for the evaluation research interviews or group discussions is not fully elucidated. In addition, the data collected tends to be subjected to an informal analysis of interviewee or focus group participant narratives, usually with no Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) or detailed content or thematic analysis of the interviewee or focus group participant discourse. Thirdly, survey questionnaires. These frequently take the form of self-designed instruments, which tend to be weak in terms of content validity. The survey findings are then presented mainly in the form of descriptive statistics with a dearth of any inferential statistical analyses. Finally, case study ‘stories’ of relevant participants. While interesting and sometimes illuminating, these do not offer baseline data to benchmark future evaluations.

Another problem is the lack of any coherent theoretical or conceptual base to underpin the initiatives: some academics have criticised SBIs on this basis. The review by Smith and Waddington (2004) is one example, in which they characterise such schemes as lacking any kind of evidence-based theoretical rationale, and representing, at best, a practical response to a perceived social problem. As they point out:

“Among the most well-known sport-focused interventions designed to combat criminal behaviour among young people are the so-called ‘Midnight Basketball’ programmes which were introduced in the USA during the 1990s. These programmes were designed to reduce crime and prevent violence by young males (aged 16 to 25) in poor inner-city urban areas with high levels of recorded crime and youth delinquency by engaging them in supervised basketball matches during the so-called ‘high crime’ hours between 10.00 p.m. and 2.00 a.m. ... However, it is worth noting that, notwithstanding the rapid growth of, and success claimed for, such schemes, there is very little evidence for their effectiveness” (p. 281).

The criticism relating to the lack of hard evidence to substantiate effectiveness claims has been raised by other researchers (e.g. Coalter, 2007; Crabbe, 2007; Tacon, 2007). As summarised by

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Smith and Waddington (2004):

“Notwithstanding the rhetorical and common-sense claims made on behalf of the effectiveness of ‘sport in the community schemes’, the consensus among more critical observers is that, despite the vast numbers of such schemes currently in operation in the UK, there is very little evidence for their effectiveness” (p. 282).

For instance, in their review of PPI, Tuohey and Cognato (2011) point out that one of the main challenges it faces is that of “Long-term monitoring and evaluation” (p. 51). Indeed, this problem is not exclusive to the sporting sphere since, as Tacon (2007, p 2) concludes:

“many policy areas beyond sport and leisure would benefit from the development of evaluation methods that could provide robust and useful evidence to feed back into policy making and project design”.

It is not just SBIs that are problematic, since, as McKeown et al. (2012, p. 341), in reviewing the issue of cross-community contact schemes, point out, “contact interventions in NI have been criticized for failing to encourage intergroup dialogue”. They further note that the success of such schemes is dependent upon two main factors - intergroup friendship formation and an open discussion of divisive issues. In relation to the former, one claim often made by the organisers of SBI schemes is that they help to ‘improve relationships’ between participants (Smith and Waddington, 2004). But few studies attempt to measure these relationships and exactly how they have been improved. There are numerous research questions here, most of which are rarely posed let alone answered. What cognitive, behavioural or affective criteria are being applied to make this judgement about relationships, and how are these measured? What types of relationships are improved? How many new relationships have been established by participants? At what level of depth/friendship? For how long do these relationships last? Such questions need to be answered if we are to be able to make definitive evaluations regarding the effectiveness of cross-community SBIs.

It would seem that government-sponsored agencies can be persuaded to spend money on SBIs since

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this is seen to ‘be doing something’ about a particular problem. In this sense, the initiatives are regarded as positive, ‘good-news’, stories. On the other hand, systematic evaluations of SBIs tend to be avoided for two main reasons: 1) they are expensive, and 2) they may produce evidence that a scheme has not been successful, with the related implication that the funding may have been wasted. The temptation therefore is to ‘pay and pray’ by funding the initiatives and hoping they will be successful. In a sense this is understandable, in that many SBIs in NI, at the very least, encourage participation in sport from groups that tend to be excluded, or bring together groups from across divided communities. It is argued that by so doing they can have a positive ‘ripple effect’ on wider society (Sugden, 2010). These are in themselves important short-term goals. It is the long-term benefits of such SBIs that are unclear, in the absence of solid research.

Kirkpatrick’s ‘Four Levels of Evaluation’ model is the most widely used template for measuring the effectiveness of programmes (Phillips, 2011). These levels are:

Level 1: *Reaction*. How satisfied were participants with the programme itself?

Level 2: *Learning*. What did the participants learn as a result of their participation?

Level 3: *Behaviour*. How and in what ways did the participants’ behaviour change as a result of their participation in the programme?

Level 4: *Results*. What are the tangible results of these changes in behaviour? (e.g. reduction in violence, establishment of long-lasting cross-community friendships, return on investment).

Level 1 is the most basic form of evaluation, measuring whether participants liked the experience of participating in the programme. On the other hand, Level 4 is the deepest evaluation level, and in many ways the acid test of effectiveness. More Level 4 type research is required into the effects of SBIs in NI.

A slightly different system was proposed by Long et al. (2002), who identified three Levels of project evaluation:



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Level 1: *Milestones* refer to the requirements of project funding bodies, such as steering group meetings designed to ensure apposite project management.

Level 2: *Outputs* are short-term products, such as numbers of participants.

Level 3: *Outcomes* refer to longer-term changes in participants or communities, such as increased contact across a community divide or a reduction in violence.

It is Level 3 evaluation of SBIs that is least likely to be carried out. This is unfortunate since, as Long et al. (2002, p. 6) highlight, “While milestones and outputs are easier to measure than outcome and effects, it is the latter that actually indicate the impact a project can have on social inclusion processes”.

In terms of comparing the relative effects of different SBIs there are also real difficulties. There are wide variations in approach across schemes, including, inter alia, numbers participating, the demographics of the target groups involved, the nature, objectives and purposes of the intervention, the geographical location of the initiative, the duration of the entire intervention and of stages therein, and the skills, qualifications, status (e.g. full-time employees or part-time volunteers) and numbers of those who lead the SBI. Another important issue here is that we do not as yet know precisely what aspects of sport or particular sports cause people in NI to feel excluded. This means that the organisers of inclusion initiatives must use their own best judgement to design the content of their projects. Indeed, one of the objectives of the present project is to overcome this dearth in research, by systematically charting the extant perceived causes of sports-based exclusion in NI and the levers that can facilitate inclusion.

What is clear from a review of the area is that more detailed and rigorous evaluation research is required into the long-term effectiveness of SBIs in NI. Having said this, those evaluations that have been carried out into NI-based schemes have shown that the interventions tend to be welcomed by the participants who often express the view that they would like more of this type of

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inclusion work to be carried out. There is also considerable impetus on government to support these schemes.

As such, the pre-requisites for success identified by Hargie and Dickson (2004b) in relation to contact schemes in NI are useful to bear in mind for those implementing SBI inclusion schemes, namely that they should be:

- *Positive.* The project should be designed in such a way as to be mutually conducive and rewarding for everyone involved. If the experience is negative, then relationships can actually deteriorate and the entire programme will then be counter-productive.
- *Institutionally supported.* The intervention must provide a 'safe environment' for those involved. No-one should feel under threat or duress. Key 'players' and groups in the participants' communities should communicate support for the initiative. This elevates the status of participation and reduces any potential risks for participants.
- *Equal.* All participants should feel that they have equal say and are fully valued. There should be no perceptions of imbalances of power between individuals or groups. This means that concerted efforts must be made to make minorities involved in any programme feel included.
- *Intimate.* Brief and shallow levels of contact have little effect. For an initiative to be successful, positive levels of camaraderie and friendship must be developed. This means that the programme should operate for a reasonable period of time. Ideally it would not be time-limited, although of course funding may be an issue in maintaining interventions.
- *Co-operative.* The project should be one where no-one is in danger of feeling a real sense of loss. The programme should create a situation where both parties know that they are working together to achieve a common goal.

To sum up, sport in a divided society is as much a contested terrain as any other cultural sphere

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within that society. In order to act as a ‘bridge’ between different groups and achieve long term success, sports initiatives must be backed by macro level national institutional partners such as political parties, community leaders and government agencies. Engagement in sport may lead to increased cooperation and social cohesion or it may reinforce antagonism and hostility, but ultimately, as Van Stuckenberg cautions, “in order to better estimate the role of sport in fostering inclusive social change, it is important to lower the often sky-high expectations of what sport can offer, especially those expectations from policy makers who often praise sport for its perceived ‘magic’ potential to achieve all sorts of positive social outcomes” (2011, p. 15).

### 2.4.3 Conclusion

As this review of literature has shown, the two fields of ‘social exclusion’ and ‘sport’ have separately generated considerable research, analysis and debate. The connection between these two domains has also attracted research and discussion, although as our review reveals there is a need for further research into the complex two-way connections between social exclusion and sport. In relation to the context of sport in NI, there is a dual level of exclusion operative. There are the traditional issues associated with exclusion in societies throughout the world where factors, such as poverty, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, disability, age, etc., impact on inclusion in a range of activities and opportunities – sport being one. In NI there is an additional level of exclusion that has long been associated with sport, that of sectarian division. This adds an extra layer to the problems usually associated with social cohesion and integration. The present study investigates and analyses both of these levels of exclusion.

In line with previous research into the measurement of social cohesion (Duhaime et al., 2004) this study focuses upon the measurement of perceptual and behavioural variables, to investigate

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structure and processes, goals, values and opinions in relation to exclusion/inclusion and sport. Previous investigations of social inclusion have been either primarily ‘outcome’ or ‘process’ studies (Nicholls, 2001). Outcome studies concentrate upon the distribution of various resources relative to the socio-economic characteristics of subjects. Process studies, on the other hand, are less concerned with precisely who is affected by inequity, but rather focus on the underlying reasons for the inequity. This investigation contains elements of both outcome and process. It charts current attitudes to exclusion/inclusion in the context of sport and sports in NI by employing both quantitative and qualitative methods to determine the nature, form and intensity of these attitudes. The next part of the Report presents findings of the qualitative phase of research.

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## 3 Qualitative findings

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## 3.1 Methodology

### 3.1.1 Introduction

In this part of the project, deep-probe, semi-structured interviews were employed in order to achieve an in-depth and multi-layered understanding of the perceptions of interviewees with regard to their attitudes and feelings towards, and experiences of, a range of different sports. Using this approach the interviewer employs a series of follow-up questions to develop a detailed picture of the issue under focus and so educes in detail the personal meanings attached to experiences by respondents (Millar & Tracey, 2009). The interviews centred on the theme of inclusion/exclusion in relation to sports in NI. They also investigated the influence of politico-religious background, socio-economic status, gender, sexuality, age, disability, ethnicity and geographic location upon attitudes to levels of inclusion/exclusion. The content of the interviews was informed by the findings from the Literature Review. Themes addressed included: level of interest in sport; experiences of feeling included or excluded from sports; barriers that particular sections of the community may have experienced in sports; whether sport in NI has played a uniting or dividing role; ways in which sporting bodies could break down barriers to help facilitate inclusion; and, how well sporting bodies have communicated with the public. The list of questions is contained in Appendix 1.

### 3.1.2 Sample

In total, 104 interviews were conducted, stratified by religion, ethnic group, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability and geographical location (across all six counties of NI). The main sample was recruited through the NILT survey, which employs a random sample of addresses selected from a suitable sampling frame. The total achieved sample is 1200 interviews across NI. In

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the 2012 NILT survey, all interviewees were asked at the end of interviews if they would be willing to participate in a future study investigating attitudes to sport in NI. Details of respondents who agreed to take part were passed to the SESNI research team. A quota sampling frame was then employed to select appropriate numbers of males, females, ages, Catholics and Protestants from across the six counties of NI. However, sexuality, disability and ethnicity could not be identified from this sampling frame, and so a purposive sampling approach was adopted to recruit participants in these three categories. LGB (lesbian, gay and bisexual) respondents were recruited with the help of the Rainbow Project charity. Transgender participants were recruited through the Oysters group (now known as Focus: Identity Trust). Recruitment of people with disabilities was assisted by the Trailblazers disability campaign group. The ethnic minority sample was recruited with assistance from the Indian Community Centre, Chinese community representatives, the NI Muslim Family Association, a rural ethnic community association, and a Belfast minority ethnic group initiative.

In the text a ‘saliency’ approach is taken to providing data on interviewees. Gender and age are given throughout the Report. However, interviewees are identified as Protestant or Catholic only in three sections, ‘The religious divide’, ‘Sport and communication’ and ‘Sport: positive or negative?’ as in these sections community background may be salient. Although a geographic spread was attained in the sample, location did not emerge as a significant variable in the data collected and so location information is not given. Sexual orientation, disability and transgender data is provided in the relevant sections but are not included in the list of interviewees in order to protect anonymity. Given the particular sensitivity of the transgender group, and their small numbers in NI, transgender interviewees are simply identified as male or female. Age information for ethnic minority interviewees was not collected given possible cultural sensitivities.

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### 3.1.3 Procedures

Once the main sampling frame was finalised, potential participants were contacted by telephone. The SESNI project was briefly outlined and they were asked if they would be willing to take part in an interview. For those who declined, a replacement was then telephoned, until the quota for each category (religion, gender, age, location) had been filled. For each participant a time was agreed to carry out the interview, usually in their home, although in a small number of cases other locations were utilised. The interviews began with a formal introduction. The purpose of the research was then explained and an outline of the topics to be discussed was provided. The participants were asked for their permission to record the interview on a digital audio-recorder. A similar procedure was followed with interviews from the ethnic, disabled and lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender groups, although in these cases the sample was comprised of volunteers from each of the bodies representing these groups. The latter interviews were mainly carried out on the premises of the organisation involved, although in a few cases they took place in Ulster University. Interviews ranged in length from 20 minutes to 70 minutes with an average duration of 45 minutes. They took place between February and June 2013.

### 3.1.4 Ethical issues

Given the sensitivity of some of the issues touched upon during the interviews, ethical issues were a key concern. Clear guidelines were set out prior to the research, and ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant Ulster University research ethics committee. A research protocol was agreed as follows:

- A signed written consent form was completed by all interviewees
- Transcripts of interviews were anonymised to ensure that participants could not be



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identified

- Participants were assured that recordings of interviews would be deleted and transcripts destroyed at the end of the research project
- All written material would be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked room
- Electronic data would be stored on a computer which required password access
- The identity of participants would be protected at all stages of the research and known only to the core UU SESNI research team
- All participants would be assured of complete confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research investigation and during the dissemination of findings.

### 3.1.5 Data analysis

The method adopted in the qualitative part of this project comprised a broadly discursive approach, which regards language as a social practice and views the context in which it occurs as of central importance (Wodak, 2001; Fairhurst, 2009). In recent years, discursive approaches have become increasingly central to social science methodology as a means of observing and understanding social, cultural and psychological phenomena (e.g. Gee, 2005; Potter, 2007). All discourse approaches study “who uses language, how, why and when” (Van Dijk, 1997, p. 2). Discourse as social science methodology combines a number of methodological orientations, including elements of pragmatics, rhetoric and conversational analysis, given that each discursive event may be “simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 4).

The focus for this thematic analysis was inclusion/exclusion within sport in NI. The transcripts of the interviewees were therefore analysed with the intent of identifying instances of inclusion and

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exclusion experienced by interviewees, taking cognisance of both the narrative and the story. We concur with Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) that while no discourse or textual analysis can totally identify the beliefs or meanings that people ‘really hold’, “it is possible to focus on utterances which reflect attitudes, and to ask oneself the following questions. On what occasions are the different attitudes expressed? How are the utterances constructed? In what contexts are they included and what functions do they fulfil?” (p. 232). Our analysis therefore addressed these questions through the prism of inclusion/exclusion within sport in NI.

However, instances of inclusion/exclusion in sport simply aren’t just ‘out there’ awaiting discovery, nor are they unproblematic constructs. Rather, their essence, form and impact are dependent on the goals and social positioning of actors and audiences, operating within a context in which there may be multiple agendas and interests (Hargie et al., 2011a). Thus, all language in use “produces a particular version of what it is supposed to represent” (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000, p. 142). Our focus was on the inclusion/exclusion instances related by interviewees, while recognising that this represented their versions of this reality.

All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and inputted into NVivo for data management and analysis. There were two main coding stages (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). Firstly, open coding enabled the researchers to become familiar with the data through in-depth reading of the transcripts and discussion with co-researchers and allowed the researchers to identify tentative emergent themes. Secondly, axial coding was conducted to chart the basis of the relationships between the recurring themes emerging from the data. To ensure reliability a number of transcripts were selected and the researchers coded the data individually. Any discrepancies were discussed until common themes were agreed. This process was repeated until researchers were coding the data consistently.

Thus, each researcher read the entire transcript of each interview for sections that explicitly

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addressed exclusion or inclusion from sport in NI. The text was further read to highlight those portions which specifically identified causes of inclusion/exclusion. The content was then coded independently by the three researchers to identify and delineate themes. Exclusion/inclusion causes were mapped and detailed examples of each were compiled. This involved the process of ‘close reading’ wherein a detailed reading and re-reading of the text is conducted (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). This included the enumeration of fresh categories where clear instances of inclusion/exclusion occurred that did not fit a previously existing category. Flowing from this, samples of interviewee narratives containing discussion of inclusion/exclusion were grouped under the most suitable theme that had emerged.

The findings of the research are presented in ten sections, corresponding to the topic areas covered in the interviews. We begin by examining perceptions of how the politico-religious divide in NI impacts upon inclusion/exclusion in sport. We then focus upon those groups which, in policy and academic literature, are associated with social exclusion, namely: females, less well-off people, older people, people with disabilities, LGB people, transgender people and minority ethnic groups. The interviews explored the extent to which the participants believed such groups experienced barriers to sports participation. Given its relevance to perceptions of the inclusivity/exclusivity of sports, we also examine views on sports communication, particularly the way in which it relates to awareness of sports inclusion initiatives. Finally, we explore attitudes regarding the extent to which people view sport as a positive or negative force for individuals and communities.

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## 3.2 The religious divide

This section is organised as follows. Firstly, we explore general perceptions of the relationship between the religious divide and sport. Secondly, we probe interviewee attitudes to those sports most often referred to in relation to sectarianism by the participants – Gaelic games, soccer and rugby. Finally, we examine respondents’ views on how community division in sport might be ameliorated.

### 3.2.1 General perceptions

This topic was broached with the question: “Do you think religious community background influences what sports people play in Northern Ireland?” All of the interviewees believed that it did, and three general themes pertaining to sports division emerged: *the role of schools in channelling young people towards separate sports*; *the impact of territorial segregation on sport*; and, *sport’s function as a politico-religious marker*. It should, however, be noted that a fourth theme was also evident here, that of *crossing the traditional communal boundaries in sport*; many interviewees reported having had personal sports experiences that transcended the divide.

#### *The role of schools in channelling young people towards separate sports*

The vast majority of interviewees believed that religious division in sport is closely linked with the divided school system in Northern Ireland. A 41 year-old Catholic man said: “I can imagine there wouldn’t be a big demand to play Gaelic football among the Unionist community because they wouldn’t have any exposure to it at school”. A 29 year-old Protestant woman said:

“I think if you go to a Protestant school, it’s much more likely to be something like rugby,

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whereas I know in a much more Catholic-based school you'd probably have hurling or Gaelic football. I mean, a lot of people in the school I went to, it was much more rugby, hockey, and things like that. And then when I met people when I went to university, they were, 'Oh, you know, I used to play hurling,' and you were like, 'Well, I've never really heard of hurling.'"

To illustrate their point about sport division in schools, virtually all interviewees referred to Gaelic games and rugby as the two main 'separate' school team sports, with the former being played by Catholics and the latter the domain of Protestants. Many people stressed that individual choice has little to do with the close correlation between the sports people play and the community they are from; rather it is the limited opportunities that people are afforded due to the traditions of families, schools and communities. As a 41 year-old Protestant man commented: "I would have never, ever played Gaelic or hurling. It's not through any religious thing, I don't have a sectarian bone in my body. It's just the path that you follow, isn't it?" A 38 year-old Protestant man observed: "It's just what you're exposed to."

#### *The impact of territorial segregation on sport*

A second theme raised by participants was the role of Northern Ireland's territorial segregation in reinforcing the inter-communal barrier in sports. A 60 year-old Protestant woman commented, "Unless you were invited along with friends to watch a game, there are certain places you maybe wouldn't feel terribly comfortable". A very specific example of the territorial barrier was given by a 45 year-old Protestant woman from a large, mixed-community workplace in Belfast:

"I swim normally at [names leisure centre] but if you walk to [names leisure centre] which is a lovely centre, there's a great big mural right before you go in. And it's a loyalist mural. And I know colleagues from [names workplace] had a mixed football team of guys that worked and it would play at different venues and there were all sorts of issues around going somewhere like that, because half of the guys would have been Catholics so it would not have felt comfortable playing there. And there would have been this thing, 'don't call me Dermot if anyone can hear'. So all that stuff incenses me."

Discussing the lack of Protestant involvement in the GAA, a 65 year-old Protestant man remarked:

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“I think a lot of that is down to territory. Could you see many Protestants wanting to go to the Park [Casement] in West Belfast?” Discussing his perceptions of NI soccer, a 41 year-old Catholic man said that Windsor Park was in an area of Belfast that Catholics “would not normally feel safe in.” Thus, territorial segregation helps to ensure that certain sports remain single-identity.

*Sport’s function as a politico-religious marker*

A further aspect of the sport-sectarianism nexus is sport’s function as a perceived *politico-religious* marker. In particular, GAA and certain soccer colours and emblems were highlighted as revealing one’s community background, and for some interviewees, this had, at times, been a cause of anxiety. “You wear a football t-shirt and you’re already labelled,” said a 27 year-old Protestant woman. “Whenever we’re down in Cork I let him [her six year-old son] wear his Ulster rugby cap and there’s no problem but it’d be different with a football top.” A 22 year-old Catholic woman from a mixed community town recalled:

“It’s sort of changed now, but when I was younger you wouldn’t be able to walk about the crossroads with a hurl in your hand (...) We couldn’t go up to the park and play hurling or bring a Gaelic ball up because the local park was Protestant. Even the painting in kerbs, like the blue and orange, you know not to start shouting about all of the Gaelic that you go to see or whatever.”

A 21 year-old Catholic man said that he had become much more self-conscious and careful since moving to Belfast from his predominately Catholic home town: “In Belfast,” he said, “you’re walking on eggshells, especially when you start talking about certain types of sports, like Gaelic and hurling”. A 42 year-old Catholic man recounted a recent occasion when he had told his six year-old not to wear his Gaelic top when they were driving to a match:

“A couple of weeks ago we were going to the match [in Fermanagh] and I actually, me and my wife said ‘right, you don’t bring your jersey with you’. Because we didn’t want to be driving through somewhere and him sitting with a GAA top on, do you know what I mean? It’s a bit silly but you can’t take any chances unfortunately.”

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### *Crossing the traditional communal boundaries in sport*

Notwithstanding the clear recognition of segregation in the main team sports, many interviewees could give examples of sporting experiences that either were outside of the norm for their community or that had significant cross-community participation. In relation to the former, the brother of a 27 year-old Protestant woman played Gaelic football having picked it up at his integrated school. Several Catholics reported being staunch followers, though not players, of rugby, while other respondents – both Protestant and Catholic – played in football teams that had mixed community membership. In terms of the latter, a 21 year-old Catholic woman who was a basketball player said she was attracted to the sport in part because of its perceived communal neutrality. A 52 year-old Catholic man was an enthusiastic member of a rambling club which had cross-community membership. A 31 year-old Protestant woman participated in roller derby and ultimate Frisbee. Thus, while the divided school system acts to ‘funnel’ young people into certain sports and not others, people in Northern Ireland nonetheless find their way into sports and activities that bring them into contact with people from outside their religious/political community.

We now focus specifically upon interviewees’ perceptions of the three main sports which previous studies have shown to be most problematic in terms of the community divide, Gaelic games, soccer and rugby.

#### **3.2.2 GAA**

In this section we examine the views of respondents with regard to the GAA. A number of positive and negative perceptions were expressed by both Protestants and Catholics and we present these separately.

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### *Protestant negative perceptions of the GAA*

Several Protestant interviewees expressed the familiar Unionist criticisms of the GAA regarding its Irish republican associations. The following excerpt is from an interview with a 58 year-old man:

“I personally would find the GAA would not be accommodating to my community. For me to go along and be a supporter or a spectator, or for my children to participate, no (...) I've no experience of actually trying to participate in Gaelic games. It's something that never really interested me. But I would find that – well, number one, a lot of the GAA grounds are named after Republican martyrs, terrorists, whatever you want to call them. A lot of them are named after those people. So I'm not going to go through the gates. If there's a game on, there's going to be a tricolour flying, maybe more than one, so I'm not going through the gates because I'm not welcome. Let's be honest, I'm not welcome...they're not coming out to my community or to my kids and saying, ‘Look, guys, this is the game. Let's see what we can do here.’ That's not happening. And I don't ever see it happening. That's the one thing that nobody's going to want to hear, but I just don't see it ever happening. Not unless there's a miracle.”

This respondent regards the GAA as unwelcoming to his community and blames the flying of the Irish tricolour and the naming of “a lot” of GAA grounds after “republican martyrs, terrorists, whatever you want to call them.” He furthermore believes that the GAA makes no effort to reach out to the Protestant community and is unlikely to ever make such an effort. A 65 year-old man similarly doubted that the GAA would ever reach out to Protestants: “I think that there's no publicity that would suggest to Protestants that they would be welcome.” This man believed that for the GAA to be more inclusive for Protestants it had to, “Remove the trappings of republicanism.... take out republicanism – the Irish national anthem, take that stuff out of sport completely.” A 38 year-old man admitted to having mixed feelings about the GAA; he was open to the sports, but more sceptical about the organisation:

“If I was in a work environment or something and five guys said look do you want to come and play Gaelic for us, we're short tonight, I'd have no problem going along, or if they said, do you want to come and watch, come down or have a big game on I'll go for the craic of a big game, I'm sure, no problem and if they said, oh do you want to come, that would be grand. The GAA and the actual organisation itself I struggle with its kind of historical attitude to, Rule 21 or something, or the whole kind of... so I think on a kind of a corporate level or a governance level I would still struggle with its kind of ethos, that it's still kind of quite nationalist and not totally tolerant, you know.”



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Nonetheless, he, perhaps surprisingly, said that he did not have any problem with the playing of the Irish anthem.

It must be said however that the Irish nationalist ethos of the GAA was not the most common reason given by Protestants for a lack of involvement in Gaelic games. Rather, Gaelic sports were simply unknown, played according to rules that were not understood and in locations where Protestants rarely or never went. When asked what he thought of the nationalist ethos of the GAA, a 72 year-old man who enjoyed watching Gaelic sports on TV replied, “But that’s their game. You’d go down to south Wales and if you didn’t know anything about rugby you weren’t welcome. It’s their national sport and you have to respect that.”

#### *Protestant positive perceptions of the GAA*

Alongside his criticisms, the 58 year-old man quoted above made two positive comments on the GAA which were shared by other Protestant interviewees. The first is his admiration for the sports themselves “I don’t mean to hammer on about the GAA because, as an organisation, they are fantastic. They really are a fantastic organisation”, and secondly the enjoyment he derives from watching them, albeit only on television, “I’ve watched, you know, quite a few of their – especially the cup games and that type of thing and get a lot of enjoyment out of watching the game”. A 32 year-old man commented of Gaelic football: “It looks like it’s a good game, a very energetic game”, while a 45 year-old woman who had little interest in any sport remarked:

“I think if you’re going to watch sport, Gaelic games are the most interesting, I’ve spent a lot of time watching football with various boyfriends and people get so excited and nothing happens. At least in Gaelic games something happens.”

A 39 year-old man had attended a match in Croke Park on the invitation of friends:

“Enjoyed it with a couple of friends who would be Catholic and went down with them to an

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all-Ireland semi-final, Down versus Cork a couple of years ago. Aside from not understanding really the rules of the game I wasn't made to feel excluded, certainly it was an enjoyable atmosphere to be in."

Although, as was noted, some Protestant interviewees viewed the politics and culture of the organisation with suspicion and distrust, some of these and others make very positive comments about aspects of the GAA. Several highlighted a positive community culture surrounding the organisation. A 32 year-old woman said:

"It seems a lot more family orientated as well, than the likes of football. Growing up I just never heard of it, didn't know it. It seemed to be like you always got the impression that people in the country, you know, real Catholic areas of the country sort of place. It was something you never came across but obviously as you get older you learn a bit more about these things but it seems to be even more of a family thing and everyone knows each other. You go to a football match and probably won't know who's sat beside you whereas GAA seems to be a lot more a community almost."

Another woman, a 45 year-old, who had attended Casement Park with friends, recalled the positive atmosphere and absence of segregation among fans; she remarked, "this was a real family, anybody's welcome, you know?" A 30 year-old man, a keen rugby player and supporter, had come into contact with the GAA after marrying a Catholic. He had been struck by the strong sense of local loyalty engendered by the GAA. He reflected:

"I think it's [the GAA] a really positive organisation that has a real sense of community, too. And I know that people feel very strong allegiance towards their local clubs and I think it's great. And you know, the participation in Gaelic sports is strong and there's obviously people have an allegiance and a desire to be part of that. So yeah, I guess rugby clubs, in a similar way, would have that but they seem to be less so than what is evident in Gaelic clubs in terms of community involvement and commitment to a local team."

A 32 year-old man who was an avid soccer player and supporter had observed and admired the disciplined training regime within the GAA, claiming that Gaelic players, in contrast to their soccer counterparts, tended to avoid alcohol.

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In summary it is clear that, despite the barriers that exist – chiefly, segregated schooling which makes it unlikely that Protestants will experience playing Gaelic sports and the Irish nationalist culture of the GAA – there was nevertheless considerable good will towards, and admiration for, Gaelic sports amongst a number of Protestant interviewees. Unsurprisingly, there was a relationship between positive views of the GAA and the experience of having had some form of actual contact with the sport itself.

*Catholic perceptions of the GAA: awareness of potential barriers*

The interviews with participants from a Catholic community background also revealed a mixture of both praise and criticism of the GAA. The passionate dedication to the GAA of some Catholic interviewees was clear, as was its importance to their sporting and social lives. Nevertheless, there was broad understanding of why Protestants may not find the GAA appealing. A 42 year-old man had played Gaelic all his life, sometimes up to eleven games a week: “that was my *raison d’etre*”. He was still heavily involved in his local club, yet he was conscious that certain aspects of the GAA – such as the playing of the Irish national anthem – acted as barriers to participation:

“Obviously Gaelic is still a predominantly nationalist sport, even though in the local club the goalkeeper is a Protestant fella. And I think he plays for one of the soccer teams too, as well, but it could be made more open. Like the idea of playing the anthem before matches, I still don’t get. I don’t understand why you need a stamp, a political song or a national anthem on top of a sport.”

Another GAA member, a 39 year-old man, had a similar view, and pointed out that anthems and flags should be removed from all sports:

“I would personally like to see any sort of flags or national anthems taken out of it for a start. I think what put off Catholics going to Windsor Park and watching Northern Ireland was the national anthem being played, the British national anthem. And I think by the same token Protestants going to watch Gaelic, the first thing they’re going to hear in a match is the Irish national anthem. I would take flags and anthems out of it. I don’t know why we need the national anthem before a football match. I’m not going to a football match for a political rally. Two teams go at it hell for leather for a bit of entertainment.”

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Some Catholics singled out the (now ended) membership ban of members of the security forces: “some daft exclusion of the PSNI and army” as one man referred to it. A 52 year-old man, when asked what groups of people he thought might face exclusion from sport in NI, responded:

“Policemen and Gaelic is a prime example. They can play in it, I think, but they're not welcome. Well, I don't think they're welcome, anyway (...) I think that sport has got its own problem, inherent problem, because it's a Catholic dominated sport and they should start sorting themselves out because the GAA is a beast. It's a beast.”

He was in no doubt that the GAA had an exclusive Catholic ethos. A 21 year-old man – a regular attendee at GAA games – was aware that the GAA had distance to travel to become welcoming to all traditions:

“I think the GAA should be for both sides of the community. But I would imagine it would be harder for maybe a Protestant to think they could join a GAA club. Rugby is seen as a Protestant sport, but I think Protestants are probably more welcome for Catholics to play that sport. It's easier for Catholics to play [rugby] than it is for... There's people that see the GAA as a Catholic organisation – which it is, but I see it more of a sport, so there is definitely improvements that could be improved.”

An interesting view was offered by a 21 year-old woman. She was a committed basketball player and although she had attended a Catholic school she had not had the opportunity to play Gaelic games. She said she would like to have a go, but was unsure how comfortable she would feel in that context:

“Even though I'm Catholic I wouldn't be like – I don't know how to say it, but I wouldn't be really in your face about it and know about all the troubles.

**You mean you wouldn't be political, overly nationalist?**

Exactly. So I know that in those [GAA] teams it does tend to be like that and I'd just feel a wee bit intimidated.

**It's interesting that you would feel that it was a bit alien, even though you're from that community.**

It definitely is.”

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In a similar vein, a 71 year-old man, a regular attendee at GAA matches, said that the GAA was “semi-political” and a lot of the people involved would be “nationalistic minded”. Thus, “the barriers are definitely there”. Furthermore, he recalled that in his youth, for him as a Gaelic player, soccer had been “taboo”, a ban which he thought was “stupid”. This was still a source of regret for him: “I love my Gaelic and my hurling, but I would also loved to have gone to a soccer match. I’m quite sort of conscious about that.”

Although most of these interviewees wished to see what might be called a ‘de-politicisation’ of the GAA, a few were cautious about rapid cultural change in the organisation. The 42 year-old man quoted above recognised a dilemma in such a task: there were many in the organisation – an older generation with strong memories of the ‘Troubles’ – for whom the traditional symbols of nationalism were meaningful. Therefore, “if you’re talking about cultural change within the sporting dimension, if you make big leaps, you will exclude people who have a strong identity”. A 34 year-old former Gaelic player was open to change, but noted that there were changes that needed to take place on both sides of the divide:

“I wouldn’t go gung-ho and just change everything because I think it’s probably the same on both sides the national anthem and the flag and the names on the Gaelic side but I think if either change there’s still people going to berate them for it. There’s, how do I explain it? I think people use those things as a stick to beat people with and if they go, they’ll find another stick. But, at the same time if people are genuinely interested in going and playing and those are barriers to going and bringing people in, I’d say go for it.”

### 3.2.3 Soccer

Despite the fact that as a sport it is not exclusively identified as the domain of either community, with players and spectators from both sides of the community, soccer in NI has been plagued with both sectarian division and, at times, sectarian violence. How did the interviewees view this

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phenomenon, and to what extent has it acted to dissuade people from supporting local soccer? Findings were mixed.

### *Sectarianism as a barrier*

A number of interviewees, both Protestant and Catholic, did report that the game's sectarian associations put them off local soccer, for example:

"I've always felt soccer in a Northern Irish context had always a sectarian dimension to it. And to be honest it would have always have put me off. I think I've been to one Irish League game. And I wouldn't even go to sit and watch Northern Ireland play to be honest. Because I think there's a sectarian dimension to that as well" (Catholic male, 52).

"I wouldn't go [to Windsor Park] no matter what. Even if I got a free ticket, I still wouldn't go. I just think it is, I just think that's what it's full of and just – any of the Irish football teams, that's what it's all about – politics. That's what's sad about football over here, that's all it has to do with. It shouldn't be" (Catholic male, 32).

These interviewees were not alienated from football in Northern Ireland because they were strong nationalists (neither was). It was simply the fact that soccer, in their view, was synonymous with sectarian politics.

Similarly, these Protestant interviewees, neither of whom appeared to have a strong Unionist/British identity, were also despairing of the attitudes they had experienced in soccer:

"The Irish League games, the last one I would have gone to would have been with my dad it and it was a bit kind of embarrassing 'cause there was that much bad language and sectarian abuse that you kind of were like – it wasn't comfortable for either of us, really" (Protestant male, 32).

"[I stopped going to Windsor Park] because I was totally fed up with the attitude of certain people who went on it. It got to such a stage I just wouldn't go back. The atmosphere at matches and the whole religious innuendo at the back of it all and I just got fed up and cheesed off with it. I haven't been to a football match in Northern Ireland for years. I just

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simply won't go and yet I can go to a rugby match at Ravenhill and there's just no comparison" (Protestant male, 65).

However, it must be said that these interviewees by their own admission had formed their negative opinions based on experiences that happened years ago, and their views had been reinforced by sporadic incidences of soccer trouble that had been reported in the media. Others, too, had formed negative impressions of soccer either through the media or second-hand anecdotes.

### *Soccer: positive perceptions*

Those who had attended a Northern Ireland international or Irish League match recently had more positive views. For example, this 41 year-old man regularly acted as a steward at Windsor Park and had observed dramatic change in recent years:

"But the fans have improved an awful lot, sectarianism is going from football, but there's still a hard core of it (...) Football is more – you're getting down into some quite loyalist, fierce loyalists. There's a fan base of Northern Ireland football. Although I'd say 95% of them are perfectly nice, good fellows. And there's a lot of families who go [to Windsor Park] – a lot of people bring their kids to football now, which didn't happen 15 years ago. Like you get an awful lot of fathers and sons, dads, fathers and sons; grandfathers, sons and grandsons and coming. And the family thing has been pushed. 15, 20 years ago it was all tough young men and not anymore. Because what happens, if you shout anything sectarian, they're all season ticket holders, so if you shout, you know, 'Fenian' or anything, the stewards will get your name and know you are from your seat number and send you a letter home."

Two young Catholic men had recently attended Windsor Park without any feelings of being unwelcome. They were happy to go again. Two interviewees – one Catholic, one Protestant – were regular attendees at Irish League matches and neither had observed behaviour that they thought was out of the ordinary for a soccer match.

Some respondents commented that the problems associated with soccer in NI like poor facilities, sectarianism, a culture of machismo and occasional violence, are features of soccer culture in many

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countries; they are not unique to NI. A greater obstacle for our interviewees in supporting local soccer than sectarianism was the perceived poor quality of the game. This 41 year-old Catholic man said he would not support the Northern Ireland team, but intimated that he probably would under certain circumstances – if they were more successful on the pitch:

“It’s not that I would take a stand because I’m from one tradition. I would go more for the Republic, which I think probably northern Catholics would lean towards the Republican football team. They’d see it as more of a natural allegiance because they wouldn’t feel comfortable around the likes of Windsor Park and they just wouldn’t feel part of that. But if they were a bit more successful, I would say I’d probably be more inclined.”

Given that soccer is a sport which Protestants and Catholics share, and that, as this respondent suggests, success tends to swell support, perhaps hints at the prospect that were the NI international team to be more successful, soccer could become a force for reconciliation and the creation of a shared identity.

### 3.2.4 Rugby

The image of rugby among both Protestant and Catholic interviewees was overwhelmingly positive. In fact, it was frequently contrasted favourably with soccer. “Soccer is divisive,” said a 72 year-old Protestant woman. “There’s no doubt about it. Rugby is the opposite.” A 52 year-old Catholic man commented: “[Rugby] doesn’t have the sectarian dimension to it. It’s maybe embraced by both communities even though it’s a 32 county sport. It doesn’t seem to be divisive in the way football would be.” One man, a 42 year-old Catholic steeped in GAA, regretted he never had the chance to try rugby; he enjoyed watching the Friday night Ulster matches on television with his family. A 34 year-old former GAA player, who attended Ravenhill occasionally, remarked on how rugby had broadened its appeal, though he was unsure how it had actually achieved this:



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“I don’t know what rugby are doing [to broaden its support] but it’s working. I don’t know if it’s that rugby has taken off on the island of Ireland because Munster and Leinster are getting bigger as well, but Ulster is attracting cross community support now. I wouldn’t say it’s a massive cross community support but it’s definitely growing. They’re doing something but I don’t know what it is. See they made the four provinces professional and almost made them like clubs so something’s happened there and it’s started to appeal to people. Like ten or 15 years ago I would never have thought of going. TV could be a big thing about it. It’s on TV more.”

Another Catholic interviewee was a season ticket holder at Ravenhill. The absence of spectator segregation, the sportsmanlike conduct of players and the more family-friendly atmosphere were commented on repeatedly. (As some of the interviewees highlighted with regard to problems associated with soccer, these positive aspects of rugby culture are indicative of the sport as a whole and not unique to NI.)

Interviewees did recognise rugby as a predominantly middle class pursuit, with a strong tradition in Protestant grammar schools. Discussing the difference in crowd behaviour between soccer and rugby, one man, a 41 year-old Protestant who was a regular spectator at both sports, commented that the working-class crowd at a soccer match tended to be drawn from areas that, unlike middle-class rugby supporters, had experienced both disadvantage and political violence: “The people who support rugby and go to rugby haven’t been subject to the same types of external influences and experiences as the people who go to football, so that hatred’s not bred into them.” However, no respondents said that the middle-class culture of rugby caused them to feel alienated from the sport. One season-ticket holder, a 30 year-old Protestant man, said that he believed that there had been a noticeable diversification in the crowd at Ulster rugby home games in recent years, both in terms of religious community background and class:

“The crowd at Ravenhill on a Friday night is very different than what it was even five years ago and it’s increasingly becoming a really mixed crowd, as opposed to it being the sort of – I don’t know, there’s – you can tell there’s a greater cross-section of the community there on a Friday night and the atmosphere is very family friendly and very convivial if that’s the right word, you know, it’s a very relaxed atmosphere; and that’s a noticeable change. And the crowds are – the games a sell out now, so – and I suppose I’ve noticed that rugby is,

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within my workplace where it's a mixed workplace in terms of religious background, rugby is the one that everybody is aware of now and can talk about, I guess, and has an interest in. I don't wish to sound snobbish but you can tell that there are more working class folk there and it's not the kind of old school rugby crowd that are just going to Ravenhill on a Friday night. There's a mixed crowd and it's people from what, I would imagine, are all different backgrounds."

This respondent's testimony that a shared sport – in this case rugby – can act as a point of contact between people from diverse backgrounds is a significant endorsement of the 'bridging' capacity of sport.

One negative view of how politics intrudes on rugby was given by a 65 year-old Protestant man who was a committed fan of Ulster and Ireland rugby. He was irritated by the fact that at home matches, although the politically neutral 'Ireland's Call' – used as a unifying anthem acceptable to Unionists and Nationalists – is played, nevertheless, the Irish national anthem is still played as well. "To me it's ridiculously silly," he said. "To me that makes the whole thing a nonsense."

### 3.2.5 Overcoming sectarian barriers

Interviewees were asked how they believed sectarian barriers in sport could be tackled. As can be seen below one, pessimistic, theme was that *nothing will change*. However, most people believed that greater cross-community participation was possible, at least in the medium to long term. Three main themes emerged in relation to ways of achieving such cross-community involvement: *changes at school level*; *actions by the sports bodies themselves*; and (the most common) *introducing young people to a wide range of sports at an early age*.

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### *Nothing will change*

A small number of interviewees dismissed the view that anything would or could change, although very different reasons were expounded to explain this pessimism. A 32 year-old Catholic man was pessimistic due to weariness with the relentlessly tribal politics: “The old ones are still stuck in their old ways and it's never going to change. You're never going to get sectarianism out of Northern Ireland, no matter what you do it's still going to be the same.” A 26 year-old Protestant woman was pessimistic about change because she struggled to imagine how, practically, traditional sporting allegiances could evolve:

“Somebody who supports a football team, they're going to support it – you're born and raised following it and that's – you know, how do you suddenly tell them, no actually, you're going to go and follow this one? Do you think you can do that? And same being like if you're a Gaelic supporter.”

Similarly, a 38 year-old Protestant man commented that the national question created an ‘either/or’ dilemma that was impossible to solve: “I think you'll never resolve our national problem, because you'll never get an all-Ireland team and you'll never get a UK team that everybody in Northern Ireland would get behind.” Many interviewees recognised that division in sport reflects the wider societal division between Protestants and Catholics. A 32 year-old Protestant man commented that until people's attitudes softened, there was little sports could do to become more inclusive:

“I don't think you could sort of say right we'll do this in sport to unite to both sides or all sides of the divide because society isn't doing that in itself and you need the acceptance in society. Because there are still people who will say, right my kids aren't going to that because there's going to be Protestants there or there's going to be Catholics there. So until all that's eradicated I don't think there's any way you can say in sport we're going to do this and then everyone can come to it because there are going to be people who won't be allowed to come to it because of their parents' beliefs.”

By contrast, others were pessimistic because they held partisan views themselves. This 60 year-old Protestant man was nonchalant about the idea of sports inclusivity, suggesting that some form of

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social division was a natural and common feature of societies around the world:

“I mean, you go to Turkish Cyprus, you know what I mean, there’s bitterness and there’s – even Canada there’s bitterness, but that’s not Protestant/Catholic, that’s British and French, you know what I mean, so I think there’ll always be divisions. So probably they will maybe close up a wee bit but they will never be [completely gone].”

A 58 year-old Protestant man who found the GAA to be unwelcoming to his community suggested that greater sports inclusivity was solely a task for the GAA. He was pessimistic that that organisation would take steps to become more inclusive:

“I’m fifty-eight and a half years on this earth; it’s [greater inclusivity] not going to happen because it’s not going to change. They’re not going to rename the Gaelic grounds to call them Green Park Villas. They’re not going to remove the tricolours. They’re not going to remove the Republican slogans that you would find round these places, more so maybe some places than others (...) We’re still going to be two communities in another fifty-eight or fifty-nine years.”

However, this negative view that changes were unlikely in relation to sectarian divisions in sport was not the most common response to the question of how sports might become less segregated, as we now explore.

### *Breaking down barriers: change at school level*

Since schools have such a strong influence on what sports people play throughout their lives and the peer group young people mix with, various interviewees, both Protestant and Catholic, suggested that the ultimate solution to segregated sports would be integrated education. A 52 year-old Catholic man commented:

“Integrated schools at the end of the day will be the answer [to sectarianism in sport] but that’s a long way off. But that’s probably the long term solution to part of our problems. Certainly education plays a big part, we’ve seen that in our generation, the history people are taught, the more educated you are the more tolerant people tend to be.”

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A 63 year-old Protestant woman said: “At the end of the day it comes right down, I feel, to our lack of interest or our apathy regarding integrated education. We wouldn’t have these problems because all sport would be included.”

A 38 year-old Protestant man suggested a structural change that could transform sport. He contrasted the situation in NI, where young people’s sport takes place mainly within schools, with England, where the local club is the key site of sports participation. If, he said, clubs were to increase in prominence vis-a-vis schools in NI, the power of single-identity schools to perpetuate single-identity sports would be reduced. Young people would have the opportunity to mix with peers from a difference religious community background and to share with them an allegiance to their local club.

*Breaking down barriers: actions by sports bodies*

A second response to the question of how sports could transcend sectarian division concerned what sports authorities themselves could do. A 52 year-old Catholic man spoke in relation to Irish League football: “The message has to go out from the clubs, like the way it has in England in terms of racism. They need to say sectarianism just isn’t acceptable.” A 52 year-old Protestant man said: “It’s got to be led from the top. It’s got to be led from the likes of the Irish football league teams, they’ve got to set the example for the smaller community teams to follow.” The desire of some to see the nationalist trappings of the GAA removed has already been mentioned. A 52 year-old Catholic man said: “They [the GAA] could go out and actually say that people are welcome, no matter what religion they are. Whether they do or not, it never comes across as that.” A 28 year-old Catholic woman suggested a media “awareness campaign” that might communicate the openness of sports to all people.

The most frequently offered response emphasised the importance of young people having the opportunity to experience a wide range of sports, including those from outside their tradition, from an early age. A 39 year-old Protestant man commented:

“I think you probably need to look at engagement within primary schools and also within secondary schools, I think particularly within primary schools, exposing children to other sports at a young age, or certainly at the time where they’re able to socialise with other young people, so whether that’s through integrated education or some other means where you can expose people to it. So again just based on my own life, I do not think even if I was now to have the ability to go and play GAA that I would because I’m already involved with other sports, there’s not the time or the inclination. If you want to engage people with, or excite people about sport, it needs to be done from a younger age”

Similarly, a 19 year-old Protestant woman stated:

“It’s probably one of those things that sport needs to be seen as just a sport. It’s not for a particular background. So at school, maybe you could be introduced to more things, more sports, maybe more after-school things that if you wanted to have a go at something, you could. Or again, locally, to run something that anyone that’s interested in it could go to. But I think you sort of have to get people introduced to it first. That would probably be better.

**If you were back at school, would you have liked to have been given the opportunity to play other sports from other traditions?**

Yeah, I think it would be quite nice, you know. It would have been much more varied than always going to play the same game of hockey every day or every week. I think it would be quite good to let people try something different.”

A 21 year-old Catholic woman said: “The older generation are passing their views and prejudices down. And I think if you can get directly to the kids and show them that there’s no difference between one community and another community then it would sort of help to stop it.” A 30 year-old Protestant man admitted that when he had visited a GAA club he had felt it to be “a very alien sort of place” and that this would not have been the case had he had the opportunity at a young age to play Gaelic games. A 34 year-old Catholic man who was a rugby fan recalled a rugby player visiting his school and taking the boys for a day’s training in rugby. It was a one-off event, he said,

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but “we all loved it.” A 52 year-old Catholic man said of the GAA: “They could go to the other schools, go to the junior schools to start getting the other kids from junior schools playing it.”

However, the limits of sports inclusion in the absence of wider societal change were illustrated by the remarks of a 30 year-old Catholic man, married to a Protestant, who lived in Belfast and whose young son played soccer, Gaelic and rugby. This interviewee said he wanted his son to grow up with less “hang-ups” than he and his wife, however, despite this rounded sports education and the fact that his son had thus far moved easily between the three sports, the man admitted that he believed this would not always be the case. He thought that the sectarian divide would become an ‘issue’ for his son in later years: “He’s at that age when he’s asking us about flags and what they’re for and stuff. So it’s probably something that’s going to arise more and more.”

### 3.2.6 Summary

To summarise, our sample believed that community background continued to be a strong determinant of what sports people play and support, and the reason for this was thought to be primarily the on-going salience of the link between religious community, school and sport. Nearly all interviewees exemplified this link in their own lives. Interviewees gave examples of how sport continued to act as an ethnic marker and how territorialisation along community lines inevitably impacts upon sport. However, while community background was a strong influencer in sports preference, it was not immutable, nor was it relevant in relation to every sport.

Views on Gaelic games, soccer and rugby were complex. Protestant disapproval of the GAA was evident, for the oft-repeated cultural and political reasons, yet so was recognition of its community spirit and organisational acumen, and enjoyment of watching the sport on TV – sometimes within

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the same individual. Although most Catholic interviewees were comfortable in a GAA environment, and, for some, the organisation had played a key part in their lives, they were nonetheless aware that people from the other tradition viewed the organisation differently. Indeed a number of Catholics were sceptical about the GAA for the same reasons as Protestants.

Soccer was regarded as divisive, and some interviewees had had negative experiences at matches. That said, the role of the media in highlighting incidents of trouble to those who had little personal experience of the game was also apparent and some interviewees recognised improvements. Rugby was generally portrayed by many as a paragon of how sports should avoid communal politics.

While a small number of people were pessimistic about the prospect of breaking down the sectarian divide in sport, most believed action taken at various levels could ameliorate division. Integrated schooling, inclusivity outreach and leading by example on the part of sports bodies and sports clubs, together with greater efforts to introduce young people to both communities' sports at a young age were all offered as possible remedies for sectarian division in sport.



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## 3.3 Females

The question, “Do you think women face barriers to participating in sport in Northern Ireland?” received a wide variety of responses. Although a small number of participants articulated positive views in respect to women’s inclusion in sport and believed that *women are not excluded*, most interviewees felt that women faced particular stumbling blocks. These included *negative media portrayals, family responsibilities, body image, and discomfort in facilities*.

### 3.3.1 Women are not excluded

Several interviewees, both male and female, believed that women did not experience exclusion. A 25 year-old woman, who had little interest in sport, commented:

“I don’t really think so [that women face barriers]. I think like with men, there are women who are more inclined or more enthusiastic or more gifted at sport and would wish to pursue it and there are others that are like me, just, you know, don’t have those kinds of leanings or inclinations. I don’t think there’s any barriers for women now.”

Another young woman, a 21 year-old, similarly did not believe that women were excluded. When asked whether she believed girls were restricted by an impression that ‘sport isn’t for girls’, she said:

“Coming from a school where PE’s compulsory I think it’s helped with that mentality. There’s obviously some girls who just didn’t play sport, but I don’t know if that was pressures on them that it’s not a girly thing.”

Again, personal disinclination was seen as being responsible for lack of participation, not exclusion. A 72 year-old woman was adamant that females did not face exclusion; she said she had once tried

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to get a women's rugby team together but found no interest: "they just didn't fancy it". A few interviewees suggested that this disinclination was a female characteristic – women are simply less interested in sport than men. A 30 year-old man commented:

"Without sounding sexist, it's always been a more male-dominated world. Like five-a-side football is a regular for a lot of blokes that I know, whereas girls don't generally get together – or any of the girls that I know aren't as – you know, wouldn't be as quick to get together to do sport; whereas there's lots of my friends where sport would be what we meet up to do regularly."

Similarly, a 38 year-old man commented: "Whether it's nature or nurture the number of women who are interested in sport is less than the number of men who love it." He felt that women may face difficulties accessing sport if it was a sport that was not traditionally 'female', yet, he said, "I'm not convinced there's masses of ladies wanting to play rugby for example." One interviewee, a 32 year-old man, was heavily involved in Jujitsu; he had found it not to be a popular sport with women, despite efforts to increase numbers of females:

"In Jujitsu they did a programme to try and get more women into it but we found that didn't really happen because they spent a lot of time and money trying to do this but generally the uptake in the end wasn't very good anyway because they just basically found out that women generally aren't interested anyway."

A 60 year-old woman who again believed that sport was a 'personal interest' choice, said: "I suppose from the point of view of being female there are things that you automatically would be drawn to and others that you wouldn't be drawn to."

Some respondents articulated a view that the position of women in sport was continually improving and believed that barriers for women were reducing all the time. For example a 34 year-old man believed the situation was improving steadily, at least within the GAA: "I'm going to go back to Gaelic because that's the one that I'm involved with and ladies football's becoming huge. That's

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only the last ten years. I think there's about ten or 15 teams now in Tyrone if not more." A 72 year-old man commented: "When I was playing rugby, if somebody had suggested, 'What about if we get a women's team going and a club,' I mean, it have would been, 'What are you talking about?' you know. Yes, attitudes have changed. There's no doubt." A 52 year-old man said: "I wouldn't have thought so in this day and age. Women are pretty much on board with every sport. It used to be male dominated but like even boxing, football and cricket have women's teams." Another 41 year-old man described at some length what he saw as the increasing involvement of women and girls, as players and spectators, in Gaelic games:

"I would say that's decreasing [barriers for women] because you see more women's things coming up in different sports, soccer and Gaelic. I'm talking a lot about Gaelic now because that's the sport I know. I know most Gaelic clubs now have well certainly, an under-age level that would mix and give boys and girls opportunities. Girls would play on boy's teams even. So there are more opportunities, I know now going to games that in the last I would say, well probably about 20 years ago, the supporters, if you looked around at a football match most of them would have been male and older. Younger males would maybe go and maybe some children. Fathers bringing their kids and that type of thing. I would say the last 15 years, 10 years I don't know what the figures would show on this but there's a lot more females. Wives go to football matches, families, younger teenage girls. There is a bigger fan base that way. That might be something to do with the facilities. Maybe they're more family friendly you're not standing on mucky grounds any more. You've nice seated areas and there's facilities. It might be something to do with it being more attractive and maybe promotion of the games has improved. I think the support base has changed a lot."

### 3.3.2 Perceived barriers to women's participation

#### *Media coverage*

However, the majority of respondents acknowledged that women still faced some barriers in sport. The most frequently mentioned factor in women's exclusion was the media – both a lack of media reporting, and poor quality coverage. A 23 year-old woman said:

"I think maybe male sport is taken more seriously sometimes than women's sport in the media. I think it's one of those really stupid things you read about, like when they're giving

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out honours, you know, for sport and things like that and you hear that the cricket team, the male cricket team for England, had won something so they got OBEs or CBEs, whatever it was. And the women's cricket team had been world champions for about five years in a row and they hadn't got anything. It's a media thing and I think it's just that, I suppose, the male sports are maybe big things, like football. You know, it's a much more male dominated area, I guess."

Other interviewees made similar statements. However, a few interviewees pointed out that a lack of media coverage was simply due to supply and demand: more people are interested in men's sport so it gets the attention. One woman, a 49 year-old, even said that she would rather watch men's sport than women's.

Two interviewees also mentioned problems with *how* women and sport are portrayed in the media. A 27 year-old woman cited the sexist portrayal of women in the sports-themed advertising campaign for Hunky Dorys crisps, while a 50 year-old woman highlighted the inappropriateness of FIFA president Sepp Blatter's comment that female footballers should wear tighter shorts. Overall, there was a strong perception that poor coverage of women's sports in the media demonstrates, and perpetuates, the second-class status of women's sport, and may act to dissuade women from being interested in playing and supporting sport. It is interesting that the interviewees who highlighted deficiencies with media coverage were exclusively female.

### *Family responsibilities*

Some respondents mentioned the women's role in family life, in particular having children, as being the main barrier to participation in sport. A 29 year-old woman noted the impact this could have:

"I suppose women have children and maybe they're getting married and they have children and they've got to mind them so I think that's a big barrier to women and normally through clubs you see women maybe who have had children are maybe coming back in with the sport. Or sometimes they drop out when they get married and start a family and don't come back."

The struggle that can take place between partners in a marriage over spending time on sport and

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exercise was highlighted by several interviewees, and in this struggle it was thought that men gained the upper hand. A 42 year-old man who had a young family said:

“It’s always historically easier for a bloke to say he’s going away and playing sport but I do know that that’s dramatically changed amongst my friends and others and you can see the proliferation of women Gaelic teams and rugby teams and stuff, increasingly so, but they say that they’ve got to a stage for a woman but I would say that’s false too. Childcare is a significant barrier. Fighting about your access to the gym with your partner.”

Similarly, a 28 year-old woman commented:

“Maybe this is a generalisation or stereotypical, but perhaps if they're holding down a job, if they're, you know, trying to keep a home together, it might be harder for them to get maybe either two hour soccer or, you know, whereas for men, perhaps there's this idea that they need that escape, that they need to, you know, they're busy working and they need to let some of that energy out or whatever.”

A very clear testimony of exclusion was given by this 27 year-old single-mother. She had once been on the Ulster swimming team but now found it hard to get the chance to exercise due to parental responsibilities:

“I’d go back into [swimming], it’s just too hard especially as I’m on my own, do you know what I mean? I can’t go to a club and leave him [her six year old], I’d have to get a babysitter constantly. They should get babysitters into clubs. That’d be fantastic.”

Another young mother, 32, agreed that it was extremely difficult to find time to exercise when one has prime responsibility for children.

### *Body image*

Several interviewees mentioned what was referred to in the Literature Review as ‘internal’ barriers – attitudes held by females themselves which dissuaded them from taking part in sport. A 52 year-old male interviewee who coached soccer said he felt it was important to get girls playing sport

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from an early age, “because girls, after a while, think, ‘I shouldn't be running around, I should be doing my hair’, when they're thirteen or fourteen and on their iPad, you know.” A 39 year-old man who was a member of an athletics club had noticed that there was a poorer retention rate for females than males in his club: “I think body image and that kind of stuff that’s promoted in the media seems to be a factor.” Body image was also raised by a 41 year-old man who happened to be a swimming coach. He said that girls were often put off swimming for fear of developing “unfeminine” shoulders. A 29 year-old female PE teacher said:

“Barriers at the young age, it’s very much image and children in school don’t really want to participate in sport because of image, because they’re not looking their best, they’re sweaty and they want to do their hair after and things like that. So that’s a major factor in school that puts [female] children off sport that I’ve found.”

A 19 year-old woman, when asked if women faced barriers to playing sport, responded:

“I think so. I think body image is probably a big thing to do with that or feeling very self-conscious of what people might think. I think for some people it would but for others it might not, they might not have a confident body image. But I think for, especially teenage girls you know, it’s quite hard obviously because they’re growing up and stuff and their image is a big thing to them.”

These responses indicate a lack of confidence about one’s appearance as a significant barrier to taking part in sport, and one that may be of particular relevance to females.

### *Facilities*

Some interviewees mentioned that certain locations heightened the self-consciousness of females resulting in discomfort and exclusion. One was gyms, as a 45 year-old woman highlighted: “Gyms are full of people grunting, men grunting. The first time I ever went to use a gym was at university, 20 years ago, and that felt like totally really breaking down barriers.” A 32 year-old man had witnessed overweight women being verbally abused in a gym:

“I’ve seen ones, and I’ve heard ones saying it, about this, say some big doll come in, look at

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the state of her, and you can hear it. I've heard it. I've said, that's f\*\*\*ing ridiculous. It's not fair, she's trying to get herself fit and she's trying to do something about it.”

(Incidentally, this respondent also illustrated how self-consciousness is not the preserve of females – he had stopped playing football after developing psoriasis in his legs and was no longer comfortable about wearing shorts in public). A few people said that saunas and steam rooms could be intimidating for women. “I did do some gym work a few years ago,” said a 63 year-old woman. “I must say I did not feel intimidated by men being there. But when I was going into the sauna or a Jacuzzi and men were in it, I didn’t feel comfortable.” A 32 year-old woman said: “It’s [the sauna in a public leisure centre] very much male dominated so you could be the only female in there in your swimsuit. So that can be a little uncomfortable at times. There’s the odd comment that you would get that would make you uncomfortable.”

Two respondents perceived a general lack of emphasis on female sport. One man, the 52 year-old soccer coach, commented: “There doesn't seem to be as many female sports clubs. I mean, obviously they do hockey and stuff like that, but for girls soccer, there are very few.” The female PE teacher believed that school did not place sufficient emphasis on girls’ sport: “I’ve always thought that girls' sport is not as proactive as boys' sport, as such, especially in schools.”

### 3.3.3 Summary

As with most issues relating to gender, this topic provoked a wide range of opinions. Barriers specific to women were noted by many interviewees. These include a lack of media coverage and sexist media coverage, concerns about appearance, family responsibilities and discomfort in certain sports and leisure environments. However, some men – and women – believed that the disparity in levels of participation between males and females, the number of male and female sports clubs, and

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the media coverage of male and female sports, was a result of men and women simply having differing interests.



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## 3.4 Socio-economic status

Interviewees were asked: “Do you think less well-off people face barriers to taking part in sport?” The overwhelming majority agreed that *cost acts as a barrier*; though a small number disagreed, believing *sporting opportunities existed to suit all budgets*.

### 3.4.1 Cost is a barrier

Those who believed cost to be a barrier mentioned a number of expenses: club membership, use of facilities, clothing, equipment, lessons, and entering and travelling to competitions. A wide range of examples and anecdotes were offered in support of this view. A 30 year-old man, who enjoyed sailing, acknowledged that many people would not be able to afford to do this. A 22 year-old woman said she would like to take up netball again, a sport she had played regularly in the past: “but it’s time, opportunity and also having things that are local to me. I know of local clubs but you have to do an awful lot of travelling and things with them and without having a car it’s not that accessible you know.” As a 60 year-old woman pointed out, the cost of sport was a non-essential expenditure and would be cut out by those who had to spend finite resources on more important things.

A few people noted the cost of sport puts particular pressure on families. A 52 year-old soccer coach, said that his club had an unwritten rule that no child would not play because they could not afford it. “We give them a bypass and say, ‘Look, bring a couple of pound every week or whatever.’ There’s one girl’s mother, she pays a fiver or a tenner whenever she can and the bloke just marks it.” The same interviewee highlighted the cost of swimming: “I mean the swimming

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club, it's £75 for ten lessons, and that's it. If you haven't got the money, there's no leeway. It's madness. How are young kids supposed to learn to swim?" A 34 year-old man pointed out the cost imposed on parents by some schools. A colleague's son attended a well-known grammar school:

"They have their rugby team or whatever and all their kit has to be Canterbury. Like she spent 200 and something pound on his rugby kit that's going to be too small for him in six months probably. And it's the first year and it's a compulsory purchase thing; you can't go and find your own cheaper alternative."

A 24 year-old woman, whose job brought her into contact with students, said that they often did not take up sporting opportunities because they could not afford them; this was a serious problem because, she said, among students there is correlation between involvement in sport and course completion.

Golf was singled out by many as being especially and prohibitively expensive:

"Finance would rule out golf because of the cost of the equipment, not so much the membership because there are clubs in Northern Ireland that are municipal clubs and you don't pay a yearly membership, you just pay on the day. But there's very few municipal clubs" (male, 72).

"If you can imagine someone who's struggling financially – and let's be honest, it's not hard to struggle financially in today's climate – and their son comes along and says, 'You know, Dad, I played golf with my mates the other night and I really enjoyed it. And I wasn't bad at it.' It's going to be £500 for the fees for a year. It's going to be a no-no" (male, 58).

Some regarded golf, not just as expensive, but elitist. For example, a woman remarked:

"I can't imagine what golf clubs are like here [in NI], to me that's the absolute antithesis of anything I'd ever want to be involved in, that small town snobbery and I can just imagine a North Down golf club and the women making the tray bakes" (female, 44).

"I mean, if you take golf, it's always been termed as a money sport...I still think golf has a stigma, you know what I mean. Now I would watch golf but only if it's the British Open or something. I would have no inclinations of taking it up or wanting to be involved in it

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because of that. And it is a well-known fact, probably more so in England now, but it's happened over here, that say somebody with potential, they're all not accepted in the golf club 'cause they don't have the money or the whatever to join it and I think that's totally wrong" (male, 60).

However, another interviewee, a 65 year-old man, said that it is not golf *per se* that is exclusive but certain clubs:

"I mean if you go to, for example, [names golf club], you nearly have to have blue blood in your veins before they'll let you play there. But three or four miles down the road, you could go to [names another golf club] and anybody can play there. It's not so much the sport that has an elitist attitude it's the clubs."

This respondent also pointed out that even walking could be expensive: "I mean even myself as a hill-walker as I was for a long, long, time, I had a couple of thousand pounds worth of equipment."

Two people mentioned the sometimes prohibitive cost of sports spectating. A 41 year-old man commented on the sports he knew most about, Gaelic games. Cost could be a barrier, and again, the main losers were families:

"The group that would feel it a little bit maybe, not excluded but have problems attending a lot of the games would be families, young families and bringing children and all. I think that could be a bit of a problem because the ticket prices are a bit of an issue. You can get discounts for children and so on, under 16s but I think there would be maybe a certain reluctance to bring the family along given the prices. A bit of barrier the prices could be, prices more so than the environment."

A 60 year-old man said that he was dissuaded from going to matches at Windsor park due to the cost:

"Well put it this way, where I live now, time I travel up there, which'll take a few shillings – the way prices are now, and all right it's not like going to a Premier League match across the water or anything like, you know, but I'm sure it's still about £10 or something. Then you buy a programme and also I would just find it – I don't think I could do it."

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A significant view on the link between sport and socio-economic status was given by a 38 year-old man. He mentioned that, since people's preferences are shaped by what activities they encounter, people from poorer backgrounds will have restricted opportunities to develop interests in certain sports: "Would a less well-off person have the same exposure to develop an interest in a minority sport like rock climbing or something, because maybe we'd [better-off people] have the opportunity to see it or read about it. Even if they did they wouldn't have the opportunity to do it." Thus, it is not simply the inability to pay for a sport that acts a barrier to participation for a poorer person; their life experience may mean that it never even occurs to them to wish to participate.

### 3.4.2 Sports opportunities exist to suit all budgets

Only three people clearly disagreed that money was a barrier to taking part in sport in Northern Ireland. Two of them were grandmothers. This woman, a 57 year-old, believed opportunities were much better for children now than when she was young:

"My parents couldn't afford it [to pay for sport for their children]. Even if we'd wanted to, they couldn't afford to send us anywhere. You had to have money to go to the sports, whereas nowadays they don't bother so much. If the children have the money to pay for the club, they pay it. If they don't have money, they're still welcome. It's easier to get to. It doesn't cost the children any money. If they don't have the money, especially for football or playing tennis, you can do all sorts of things."

The other woman, a 63 year-old, believed there was plenty of sport accessible at a local level: "the opportunities are there and I think more and more community workers are now involving a lot of young people in sports and it wouldn't cost anything." And the other interviewee, a 42 year-old, commented:

"No, there's no real barrier to it. I don't see it. It tends to be a great leveller. There's other social issues that are more applicable, such as family life and stability within families, whatever. Social disadvantage is no real barrier."

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Although most respondents recognised cost as a barrier, it is important to note that many of these nonetheless noted low-cost sporting opportunities that they were aware of. “If you take a sport like football,” said a 60 year-old woman, “I don’t think that your background, your financial background is going to have a big impact on whether or not you’re welcomed into the football team.” A few interviewees mentioned leisure centres as being relatively affordable:

“I’m sure they do [less well-off people face barriers] because of the cost of things and especially if you need equipment, the kids need trainers and all that, but again, [names a Belfast leisure centre] sat there in the middle of some lower income estates around here and the Boost card means you... I mean I think Belfast City Council is a really good Council for trying to engage with the community and do stuff” (female, 45).

“Well I suppose all these things cost money, the gear costs money, going to leisure costs money etc. And I suppose yes, the money comes into it. But our leisure centre has concessions for people on benefits but it still could be a barrier for some people” (male, 52).

A 19 year-old woman said that affordable sports provision would depend on location and whether one had the means to travel:

“I think it depends what community you’re in. If there’s a good community centre that kind of has lots of grants or whatever, has a good few activities going on then not necessarily. But if you don’t then I think you do ’cause obviously the gym or even to go swimming or, it’s quite expensive to go to or you’ve to pay a membership. But I think then sometimes if leisure centres aren’t close to a community obviously the travel aspect of it as well.”

A 32 year-old new mother mentioned the provision of gym equipment in some parks as opening up exercise for people who could not afford monthly memberships – “it’s a wee bit more accessible for people who maybe feel they can’t afford to pay monthly or whatever” – though she did not use this equipment herself.

### 3.4.3 Summary

The overwhelming majority of interviewees were keenly aware that nearly all sport must be paid for

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and that this inevitably meant that some people would be excluded. The particular pressure that the cost of sport, and especially of certain sports, can place on families with children was noted repeatedly. However, it must be said that although there was a strong perception that cost (membership fees, lessons, equipment, etc.) *could* be a barrier to playing and watching sport, few of the interviewees provided concrete examples of when financial constraints had actually curtailed their own sports activities. Also, some interviewees expressed the view that there were sports available which were affordable for most people. These findings suggest that most people may either be able to find sporting opportunities that are within their means, or that they have ‘learned to be poor’ – to not desire things which they cannot afford.

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## 3.5 Older people

Interviewees were asked if they felt older people in Northern Ireland faced barriers to participation in sport, what those barriers were and how they could be addressed. In this section we first examine the views of those under 60 and then the perspectives of those aged 60 and above.

### 3.5.1 Perspectives of people under 60 years old

While most noted that physical decline was an obvious barrier, the overwhelming majority of interviewees under 60 believed that older people had adequate opportunities for taking part in sport. Two main themes emerged from the narratives of these respondents: *the perception that there were sports opportunities for older people* as evidenced by known examples of such, and, on the other hand, *a recognition that barriers to involvement also existed*. A third theme also emerged from these respondents, namely that of *a lack of opportunity for older, non-elite, adults in most sports*.

#### *The perception that sports opportunities exist for older people: role model exemplars*

As evidence of this view, many gave examples of people known to them who were active into their senior years. A 23 year-old woman said that classes run by her mother, an aerobics instructor, were popular with elderly people, even some in their eighties. Some interviewees highlighted leisure centres as being good providers of sport for older people. A 45 year-old woman said: “My experience of using municipal sport centres is that there’s a lot of stuff for older people. The council’s very good at days that are specifically for [older people]... You do see a lot of older people using those facilities.” This respondent described the important role her mother-in-law’s bowling club played in her life:

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“They have a really thriving league and they play at different clubs and she goes twice a week and that is her social life. And I’ve been up to pick her up a few times and it’s great, there’s hundreds of people and it was really thriving and there were loads of older people.”

A 50 year-old woman commented: “The over fifties club they run down in [names location] is thriving and there’s a supervisor. They just play simple things, Aquafit, all sorts. And there’s a walking programme.” A 21 year-old golfer said he knew lots of older people who played golf. A 58 year-old man mentioned a friend in his sixties who still ran marathons.

It must be said that while it is understandable that many people base their views on this issue on anecdotal evidence of older people who are very active, this may be an example of generalising from the particular. It is a weak measure of reality: it simply means that *some* older people play sport. It says little about the wider picture or barriers that might nonetheless exist for older people in general.

### *Barriers to involvement for older people*

Among the minority who suggested older people may have trouble engaging in sport, the emphasis was on *taking up* sport, rather than continuing with it. One of our interviewees, a 39 year-old man, was heavily involved in an athletics club. In his experience, he said, “you find very few 70 year olds just walking through the door wanting to run, but you will find a number of 70 year olds who’ve been running from the time they were 20.” Similarly, a 38 year-old man commented: “It’s always hard to start something new when you’re older maybe and aren’t given the same opportunities. But if you’ve been interested in sport, as you get older you just adapt.” These views underline the importance of sports participation and enjoyment for children and young people as (a) it is likely to be something that stays with them throughout their life, and (b) getting in to sport may be much more difficult later in life.



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Three people – all young women – noted that older people may *lack the confidence to take part in sports*, even if age-appropriate opportunities are available. “They maybe feel that it’s for the kind of younger generation,” said a 19 year-old. Another, a 28 year-old woman, noted that aging does not only entail physical changes:

“I suppose just their interest and their motivation, you know, at that age might be less as well, you know. I suppose there are internal changes as well as the external. Could have a huge impact on them.”

Similarly, a 23 year-old woman reflected that the media focus on young, elite athletes did not encourage the participation of older people:

“You don’t see that many things even on TV where the older generation is for example running around with 30 years olds and so I suppose it’s, there is a bit of ageism in it too because you expect people’s abilities to not be quite as good.”

Perhaps surprisingly, only two interviewees mentioned that older people may face *practical obstacles*. One interviewee, a 30 year-old female, pointed out that many older people do not drive, thus making it difficult for them to get to activities, while another, a 24 year-old female, highlighted cost as a barrier for older people with limited means.

#### *Non-elite sport and adulthood*

Interestingly, a number of interviewees took a different meaning from the question than was intended and we feel this is worth highlighting here. By ‘older people’, we meant elderly people, yet some of our interviewees understood ‘older people’ as meaning older than the elite age bracket of a particular sport, say, over 35. These people believed that there was a lack of opportunities to play organised sport at an informal, non-elite level. A 38 year-old man who had given up playing rugby when he had a family said: “There aren’t many opportunities once you’re an adult if you’re not very good at sport but you still want to be part of it.” A 26 year-old woman contrasted such

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provision with her experience of living in New Zealand:

“When I came home [to NI from New Zealand] I didn’t go back into it [hockey], or any of the sporty kind of things ’cause unless you’re really good, there’s nowhere to play. Like when I lived away, you could join five-a-side and you could join kind of, you know, lower level and it wasn’t as competitive, you know, that kind of way. So you could play and like before I was here, and even in England, we would have been, you know, in touch rugby teams and things like that, but nothing here. Nothing since I’ve come home (...) Like say hockey, you can play in the town clubs but you’ve got firsts, seconds and thirds, but they’re still quite high level, you know, and they will have on them girls who are still at school playing in all those teams. So unless you’re training flat out to kind of keep in – like keep up with it, you can’t go down socially and play.”

One thirty year-old man reported feeling intimidated by the high fitness levels of the young players on his football team. A 27 year-old woman had similar feelings about her sport, swimming; she was reluctant to return to competitive swimming because “we’d be sitting looking at a little 16 year old beating us.” One man, a 42 year-old, was trying to address the problem of shrinking opportunities for Gaelic sport:

“I’m trying to set up an over 35s recreational Gaelic group in the area... It’s not necessarily older people by the defined post 65s, older people, but it’s – there seems to be an idea, particularly within Gaelic and hurling, that once your practical application, so once you get about 35 or so, you effectively drift off and you either go into a committee, go into the bar or drop out altogether from participating in the club. And I’m trying to rectify that.”

Despite all this, it’s important to say that it was apparent from the interviews that competitive opportunities vary from sport to sport. For instance, 39 year-old man who competed at triathlon emphasised that there were competition levels for every age. Also, the comment was made by one interviewee, a 38 year-old man, that sports provision for adults may be much less than for young people simply because there is less demand. As people take on work and family responsibilities during their twenties and thirties, they cannot dedicate the same amount of time to the sport as people in their late teens and early twenties. With less people available to play, this then makes it more difficult to organise clubs/matches/competitions etc. One young woman, a 29 year-old,

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highlighted the problem of a lack of time in adulthood:

“I think they have their job and find it hard to find time in the evenings to go out and maybe go training or take part in sport. Also people that work shift work and things like that also find it difficult to find the time to be involved in sport and also have families. That’s a barrier to older people maybe getting involved in sport or maintaining the sport they’ve already started.”

### 3.5.2 Perspectives of people over 60 years old

In common with the under 60s, older respondents generally had a positive view of the opportunities that exist for the participation of older people in sport. Three main themes emerged from the interviews with this group: a perception that *sports opportunities exist* for their age group, the *importance of earlier sports participation* and a *lack of provision*.

#### *The perception that sports opportunities exist for older people*

In a similar manner to the under-60 interviewees, most of those over 60 made the point that they did not believe that older people faced sports exclusion by giving examples of older people they knew who were very active. A few, like the under 60s, highlighted leisure centres. A 60 year-old woman said:

“I know that the local leisure centre in [names location] here runs various activities for people like myself who suffer from arthritis. Now, I think things like swimming and yoga and those sorts of activities have been sort of laid on for people who would like to try them to see whether or not it helps with their health problems.”

Golf and bowls – perhaps the archetypal sport of older people – were highlighted by a couple of respondents as important activities for older people. A 72 year-old man was an avid player of bowls although he also commented that this was now an all-age sport: “we’re getting a lot of young

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players in the bowling club. I would suppose now that there's as many under 25 as there are over 60. It's perceived as older man's sport, but not anymore."

*The importance of participation earlier in life*

The previously quoted 72 year-old respondent, who had been an active rugby player but had had to give up playing due to 'lung trouble', also said of older people and sport:

"I don't think [older people face barriers]. I think it's just whether you're into sports or not into sports. In the rugby club we had one man who played in 70s and 80s, used to throw his boots out the bedroom window so his wife didn't know he was playing rugby! So really it's in the mind. It's not a matter of age, it's inclination."

This was a common theme: opportunities existed for older people but it was down to people to take them up, and the key factor in this was whether the individual had been engaged in sport throughout their life. A 60 year old woman – a keen walker but not particularly interested in sport – stressed, like the last interviewee, the importance of inclination:

"I don't think at 60 you suddenly must start playing football, but if it's something that you have say since your teens been involved in, I don't think necessarily getting to your fifties or sixties provided your health was still good you should suddenly stop doing. As you get older you move from one sort or activity into something that suits your abilities."

Others similarly stressed the role of habit through the life-course in maintaining people's activity levels in old age. A 71 year-old man said:

"To have an interest in sport you've got to have had an interest from an early age and try and influence others to play, ones who are younger than yourself who eventually you will coach or whatever. But I think if you're talking about sixty-five plus, I think they're a lost cause at that stage."

This is in line with the perceptions of those under 60 noted above: opportunities exist for those who wish to avail of them, but attracting older people to take up a physical activity may be more

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difficult.

### *Lack of provision*

Only one interviewee believed that older people suffered from a lack of provision of age-appropriate activities. A 63 year-old woman, who said she was too busy for sport herself due to her grandchildren, remarked:

“I think when you come to a certain age, an awful lot of old people have nowhere to go. So they're not active enough and this is how they get all these aches and pains. Whereas if they were active, if there was somewhere for them to participate and go out somewhere, well then they'd be getting up and going out. They'd not want to sit in the house all the time. So I think definitely there's more to be done for older people. (...) There are people out there who have nothing. They're old and they're alone. They've no family. They have no friends.”

This woman highlighted how sports provision has the potential to be part of the solution to a common problem facing older people: isolation and loneliness. A 69 year-old man reflected that sporting venues – with large crowds, and in some cases, the potential for trouble – could be intimidating places for older people, places that they may just rather avoid.

### **3.5.3 Summary**

Overall, there was a general feeling among all respondents that older people did not lack age-appropriate opportunities to play sport. Leisure centre activities, golf, bowls and other sports provide older people with important outlets for exercise and socialising. Nevertheless, as was pointed out, the older people who play sport are a self-selecting sample and may create an unduly positive impression about the ease with which older people can access sport. Similarly, older people who agree to take part in a research project on sport may be more active than those who do not.

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While some older people may not display a strong interest in taking part in sport, this, it was thought by both older and younger interviewees, was more likely to be due to a lack of interest and involvement in sport earlier in life than particular obstacles facing them now. Interviewees were conscious that increasing participation among older people may be very difficult, although the importance of sport for older people's health and social wellbeing was recognised. Several of the under 60 interviewees were aware of a lack of opportunities to play organised team sport at lower ability levels as adults – something which may jeopardise individuals' dedication to participation throughout life. These interviewees were attracted to the social and health dimensions of sports participation but suffered from the exclusion inherent in elite competition.

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## 3.6 Disability

Interviewees were asked whether they believed people with disabilities faced barriers to playing sport. We will examine the responses of people with disabilities below, but in the first section we will consider the views of the general public.

### 3.6.1 General public perspectives

A small number of interviewees either could not answer due to a *lack of knowledge* of this area or had *positive perceptions of the provision for people with disabilities*, but the overwhelming majority believed that they would face barriers. The main identified barriers were *a lack of appropriate facilities and expertise* and *location* in that those living in rural areas were felt to face greater barriers.

#### *Lack of knowledge*

Several interviewees could not answer this question, having no knowledge of the provision or lack of provision for people with disabilities. A 31 year-old woman commented that without direct contact with someone with a disability it was a difficult question to respond to:

“I suppose inevitably there are physical barriers, yes, I mean I know there’s some kind of different activities that people with disabilities can get involved in but I don’t know really anything about them or how widespread they would be, or how accessible they would be. I suppose maybe if you don’t know somebody [with a disability] you don’t know what things are like for them.”

A 38 year-old said simply: “I would hope it’s improving but I couldn’t comment.” A few people noted that while the high profile of the London Paralympics gave the appearance that people with

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disabilities were being catered for, they did not know whether or not provision for people with disabilities existed on the ground. A 60 year-old woman remarked: “I mean probably after the Paralympics there’s a very much bigger emphasis in getting as many people into sporting activities as possible regardless of ability but I don’t know whether or not we have the facilities to accommodate people with disability.” Similarly, a 60 year-old man said: “I think it’s opened it up since the Olympics started. Now where the facilities are here for them, I don’t know.”

#### *Positive perceptions of the provisions for disabled people*

A number of people believed that the position of people with disabilities in relation to sport was improving and/or were aware of sports in which they could take part. A 71 year-old man commented:

“Probably once upon a time the handicapped people would have [faced barriers], but I mean, that situation has changed quite dramatically in recent years. During the time that I played sport, it would have been unheard of in those times. I think there’s just a general acceptance now that people that have handicaps can go out and perform. I mean the Olympics was a prime example. I mean huge crowds to see the Paralympics Games. I mean, if somebody said to you twenty years ago that that would happen, you know have said ... you know. It’s been amazing just how the general public have supported the Paralympics.”

Again, the Paralympics is seen as measure of improvement, although this man appears to have little knowledge of provision for non-elite disability sport. A 30 year-old man also mentioned the Paralympics: “I think the Paralympics have broken down some of the barriers that might have been there, you know, more and more disabled people are getting involved in sport and the sports facilities are becoming more equipped and open to disabled people.” However, this interviewee also admitted: “But actually having said that, it’s been a long time since I’ve seen somebody with a noticeable disability taking part in sport in a leisure centre or something.”

Other interviewees had positive impressions of the inclusion of people with disabilities on the basis



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of their experience. In response to the question of whether people with disabilities faced barriers to sports participation, a 30 year-old woman, who was an occupational therapist, replied:

“Maybe less so now than before and I suppose the reason I say that is because I know a few people who did do wheelchair sports or, you know, I suppose even just through my job. You know, I would meet a lot of children who are disabled and are taking part in sport more, I think, probably than would have happened before.”

A 21 year-old woman who had volunteered in the Special Olympics said:

“I know obviously that there is the availability there for people with disabilities. I helped out in the basketball part of it, but there were so many teams and I still get the newsletter through. There seems to be quite a lot going on.”

*Key barriers: facilities, expertise and location*

The majority of respondents believed that people with disabilities would face considerable stumbling blocks to taking part in sport. A lack of appropriate facilities and dedicated and trained coaches/staff were proffered as the greatest barriers. A 52 year-old man said, “There probably aren’t the facilities down the snooker club. I mean, would they have the proper facilities to play snooker? They’re probably not catered for.” A 34 year-old man commented: “The facilities aren’t there for people who are disabled, even I think to get around never mind to play sport. I would even say in general life.” A 29 year-old woman, a PE teacher, believed that people with disabilities lacked sports provision because in her considerable experience within different sports she had not come across disabled players: “You do see it if you go swimming the special chair lifts they have to get them into the water but in terms of though hockey, tag rugby and football, I haven’t seen much disability sport about or any opportunities for them to be out and about.”

A 42 year-old commented that there were accessibility requirements for publicly-run facilities but,

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“if it wasn’t an official thing I would imagine yeah there would be difficulties. At community level it might not be so easy.” A 41 year-old man believed that people with disabilities would be one of the most excluded groups and believed, based on his own experience within the GAA, that provision was sorely lacking:

“I can’t think of any particular special arrangements for people with disabilities again in Gaelic at grass roots level. I don’t think there would be any particular arrangements there to give them a chance to take part in any way. I don’t think there would be much of that, much choice. I think again, facilities at a local level, grass roots level wouldn’t be fantastic.”

Several respondents believed that making provision for people with disabilities would present a range of problems for sports clubs and providers, such as additional expertise and training for coaches, a greater time commitment and the cost of specialist equipment, with the result that clubs would thus be reluctant to cater for people with disabilities. A 30 year-old man who worked in the voluntary sector said: “There’s a whole framework for working with vulnerable adults and young people that can be daunting for clubs to operate under, let alone any personal embarrassment or difficulty that a disabled person may face about engagement.” A 52 year-old soccer coach suggested that clubs may fear engaging with vulnerable people: “It’s difficult with health and safety nowadays. It’s a killer. You know, health and safety rules are just ridiculous. I know they’re there to protect people, but litigation, it’s madness.” A 22 year-old said a lack of training in how to work with people with disabilities could make the prospect unattractive for coaches. Similarly, a 32 year-old man said:

“I think they would [face barriers] big time. I think people wouldn’t have time for them. You know, maybe they want to learn a sport or something; people wouldn’t have time to teach them. Yeah, I think people would say, that person with a disability, it’s going to take me twice as long to teach him as it is him.”

One person, a 26 year-old woman, mentioned the cost of equipment: “I did a run on Boxing Day and there was a guy in one of those – you know the chairs that you pedal with your hands, so like

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the ones who do the racing and that. They wouldn't be cheap, one of those things, I wouldn't imagine."

A number of respondents felt that provision would vary greatly between urban and rural areas. The interviewee just quoted mentioned the issues of location and transport:

"If you live out in the middle of the country, how do you get to where you can play disabled sport? You're not going to find many other people in a wheelchair to play basketball with when you live in – you know, like say you lived out in the middle of sticks somewhere. If you want to play, you have to find enough people who fit the criteria for that sport."

Thus, not only are appropriate facilities required, but what is also needed is a sufficient number of others with similar disabilities to play with. A 52 year-old soccer coach also made this point: "They play wheelchair basketball and all that, but how many clubs are there? Because Northern Ireland, really, is a small population. It is small. So it's like everything; it's numbers." A 21 year-old woman said: "And I think it depends where you live as well, like some places might not actually [be] quite close to local leisure centres or local places that do sports." A 58 year-old man commented that disabled people would face difficulties playing sport, "maybe not in the Belfast area where there may be a lot more facilities available to them, but out here in the sticks again, you know, if they don't fit into the leisure centre or the leisure centre doesn't fit their requirements, then there's not a lot of sport for them."

### **3.6.2 Perceptions of people with disabilities**

Five of our interviewees considered themselves to have a disability – mobility problems, in all cases. Given the small number, and their disparate experiences, we will look at each person in turn, rather than examining their responses thematically. Two of them, a 72 year old man and a 63 year-

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old woman, were both able to walk short distances but had blue disabled badges. Neither of them engaged in any physical activity. When asked whether they thought people with disabilities faced barriers to playing sport, both of these respondents talked about people with disabilities as ‘other people’, despite the fact that their physical impairments prevented them from physical activity. Both believed that provision for people with disabilities existed.

Another interviewee, a 28 year-old woman had a mobility impairment since her teens and was required to walk with two crutches. She had used a swimming pool extensively as part of her rehabilitation but was not particularly interested in sport. She reflected that there may be a psychological reason for this:

“But you see I've never really tried. I mean I know what I'm capable of as well and I'm not going to be going on a netball court like, you know, or doing basketball or – you know, I know that. But maybe, you know, maybe those barriers aren't there but they're in my head in a way.”

This interviewee also stressed that people’s disabilities are very individual, and that this made her pessimistic that support and expertise would be there for her if she wished to engage in sport. But she accepted that she may be wrong in thinking this.

Another interviewee, a 57 year-old woman, had a similar mobility impairment. She was very motivated with regards to sports and said she had played sport all her life:

“If you haven't been encouraged to take part in sports, well I have, I am, but there are others out there who haven't. But it's improving now because we now have inclusive sports workers in most parts of Northern Ireland (...) It's different now because the inclusive worker, she's very good in the area and she's very encouraging. And you know, but before that, if you wanted to join clubs, you know, clubs or that, it was up to yourself. Down to the individual.”

Clearly, the availability of a Disability Sport NI worker in her area had made a significant

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difference in this woman's enjoyment and level of physical activity.

One of the respondents, a 23 year-old woman, had multiple disabilities. She worked for a disability rights advocacy organisation. She was unable to engage in sport but enjoyed attending sports events, and thus focused her responses on the problems of accessing sports venues. Despite advances in legislation in this area, she nonetheless had on-going disputes with venues about access. For instance at one major venue in Belfast, there was a limited number of tickets for wheelchair users, the wheelchair area was at the back of the venue, on an upper level, and the view of the stage was obscured by a metal bar. In most venues, the interviewee reported that it was only possible for one person to sit with the wheelchair user. Other problems concerned toilet facilities and public transport. Due to the severity of her disability, the standard disabled toilet was of no use to her – she required a hoist. “Most of the people who are in need of a disabled toilet will be in need of that level of support,” she said. Buses and taxis too were a problem, primarily because they were not equipped to secure a wheelchair:

“We live right on the main road, bus comes past our door. If I wanted to come [to Belfast] I would have had to ring 24 hours before to [name's town] and say to them, look, I want to come in on the bus in a wheelchair. If there's somebody in front of me with a pram, or a wheelchair, I couldn't get on the bus. If I do get on the bus, I'm not allowed off the bus from [names town] to Europa hotel, to the bus station. And there's nothing to secure my chair to the floor ...And even taxis are dangerous, because they can't clamp you down either.”

With so many difficulties, the interviewee commented: “You get fed up arguing, and your life revolves around fighting.” Of the Paralympics, she said: “There's a down side to it in that people already kind of think that everything is fixed and there's no discrimination.”

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### 3.6.3 Summary

The vast majority of the sample recognised people with disabilities as a group facing considerable difficulty in engaging with sport, although most interviewees also did not have definite knowledge of what provision existed. The Paralympics has clearly penetrated the public consciousness, creating optimism that it will have positive outcomes at grassroots level, but interviewees had little knowledge of whether this was in fact the case. A lack of suitable facilities and appropriately trained staff were seen as the greatest barriers, particularly in rural areas. Interviewees with disabilities had diverse experiences due to their varying impairments and interests. The 57 year-old woman's warm appreciation of her disability sport worker was striking, as was the 23 year-old's narrative concerning her constant battle with public buildings, authorities and service providers.

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## 3.7 LGB people

This section is divided into two parts. First, we explore general public perspectives on whether they believe LGB people face barriers to sports participation and if so, what they are, before examining the attitudes and experiences of some LGB people themselves. At the outset it is important to make a comment on the phrasing of this question. The interviewees were asked: “Do you think lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people face barriers to taking part in sport?” As we discuss in the section dealing with transgender people and sport, transgender people would reject this phrasing as they see themselves as a group entirely distinct from LGB people. We used the term ‘LGBT’ in our interviews in part because it is used by other organisations and researchers, and in part because asking two questions, one for LGB people and one for transgender people, would have made the interviews too long. However, virtually all interviewees talked only about LGB people in their answers and not transgender people. We also conducted interviews with transgender people.

### 3.7.1 General public perspectives

Interviewees were roughly evenly split between those who emphasised difficulties facing LGB people regarding sports participation and those who were more optimistic. Key themes were: a *lack of awareness of the issue* among some interviewees; the perception that *no barriers existed*; the view that *barriers may be perceived by LGB people that are not really there*; and the perception that *barriers do exist*. Obstacles to LGB participation were thought to include homophobia and the macho culture in some sports, and discomfort around LGB people in changing facilities.

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### *Lack of awareness of LGB people in sport*

It is worth noting that in general, LGB people in sport did not appear to be an issue that was high on people's agendas. Some found the question difficult to answer: "I don't know, is the simple answer, because I simply don't know," said one 58 year-old man. Others gave meandering answers, indicating that the question of gay people and sport was not one they had given much thought to before. Most significantly, interviewees reported having had very little experience of playing sport alongside people who were openly gay. Only one person – a 72 year-old man – said that he did not believe gay people had difficulty participating in sport because he had actually been in a sports club that had a gay member – a bowling club. Two people noted that it was striking that that they could not think of any LGB people who were active in their sport, despite those sports involving large numbers of people. A 42 year-old man said: "Within a huge volume of people, it still baffles me that we don't know [how many GAA players are homosexual]. You know, you usually do hear word on the street about certain people." Speaking of her experiences within basketball, a 21 year-old woman, said:

"On a lower level, club level, just thinking about it, I don't think I've actually ever come across anyone who has specifically said to me [that they are gay] .Which is strange, especially like today where it's not a big thing. I've never come across it. So it could be [i.e. being gay could create barriers to sports participation] and that's why I've never found out."

### *No barriers*

A small number of interviewees felt there was no reason as to why LGB people could not fully participate in sport. A 29 year-old woman said: "I don't know that they face barriers. All sport's open to everyone and they can join whatever they like." A 38 year-old man who until recently had been an avid rugby player believed sport was in fact a place where social barriers did not pertain: "part of my naivety about sport is, if you're good enough to kind of contribute to the team at whatever level, the rest of it kind of falls away, you know, when you're actually playing. But maybe



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I'm very naive there.”

A number of people, both old and young, answered the question with phrases like “not anymore”, or “not in this day and age”, conveying a view that Northern Irish society is increasingly accepting of LGB people. “With people's attitudes changing I think the opportunities have changed as well maybe,” said a 21 year-old man. A 63 year-old woman commented:

“If you'd asked me that question even two years ago I would have given a definite yes, they would have faced big big barriers. But I think today society is becoming more open to the acceptance of gay people. So therefore I think – well I would like to think anyway that they would be included. Having said that, there are those who maybe will not feel comfortable with them or exclude them. But I think more and more we're being persuaded in society to accept gay people.”

The final sentence of this quotation suggests that her own views may have become more tolerant in recent years, which may explain why she perceives a more general softening of attitudes.

### *Barriers perceived, not real*

Several said that certain LGB people may lack confidence to take part in sport or hold a perception – unfounded – that they would face difficulty participating. LGB may be uncomfortable in a sporting environment but that the reason for this feeling of discomfort lies with the individuals, not the sports. This view is expressed in the following quotations from two interviewees:

“No. Again, might down to the individual but it shouldn't really. Like there's no reason for it. But maybe depending on the individual and what they think of certain things, I don't know. But personally I don't think there should be a barrier” (male, 36).

“I mean, there's no real reason why they [LGB people] couldn't [take part in sport]. Maybe they would feel that's not something... Maybe it's just, they wouldn't want to put themselves into a situation but I don't see why they couldn't” (female, 45).

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### *Existing barriers*

Those who did believe LGB people faced barriers generally attributed this to the negative attitudes of fellow participants that they were likely to face, though we can tease out a number of overlapping emphases in people's responses. Firstly, some people, like this 52 year-old man, highlighted that LGB people were likely to face exclusion from sport simply because they faced exclusion in other aspects of life:

“They face barriers in normal life, let alone sport. Yeah. Yeah, of course they do.

#### **In what way do you think they would face barriers?**

Well, discrimination. People think they're different. It's just general discrimination.”

These respondents did not believe sport was a more unwelcoming field of activity than any other. Two of these people pointed out the generally conservative nature of NI society, thus suggesting that LGB people face greater obstacles to participation than elsewhere. For example, a 71 year-old man commented:

“Oh God, yeah. Of course they would, yeah [face barriers], 'cause I mean, we've just had this stupid vote yesterday [NI Assembly vote to block gay marriage]. I call it a stupid vote, there is democracy at work. But people are still, in this country here, you know are still voting with one eye on the religious clock if you like.

#### **Do you think most sports clubs would be welcoming to gay people?**

Oh they certainly wouldn't. I mean, there's definitely the anti-gay lobby and it's got easier, you know, a lot easier in England but I remember a time they were shocking (...) Yeah, they would face barriers still.”

Secondly, many interviewees highlighted the dearth of elite sports people who were openly gay as an indicator that (a) elite sport is not a welcoming place for LGB people and (b) this lack of role models makes it hard for gay people, at a grassroots level, to engage in sport if their sexuality is known. “Well even in a professional sense,” said a 21 year-old woman, “like it's a big deal when a

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professional sports player comes out that they're gay, and the majority of them don't." The two most frequently mentioned gay elite sportspeople were Justin Fashanu (an English footballer) and Gareth Thomas (a Welsh rugby player). A 57 year-old woman believed that hostility to LGB people was founded on ignorance: "There's no awareness of them [LGB people]. You know what I mean? They're hidden, you know, and there are people, I would think, who would abuse them, you know, which would be sad."

Thirdly, several people stressed that the stereotypical ideas about masculinity inherent in some sports cultures would create difficulties for the participation of gay men. A 52 year-old man said, "it is a very masculine type of environment. Probably, yes, they would be discouraged." Three people singled out rugby as being a particular no-go area for LGB people. "I couldn't imagine if you were a gay person in a rugby team," said a 30 year-old man who had been a keen rugby player. "My experience of rugby clubs was that that would just be a sort of personal suicide in effect, to come out in that crowd." Another man, a 32 year-old, suggested that the high degree of physical contact in rugby would make rugby players reluctant to have a gay person on their team. The following statement from a 39 year-old man is particularly interesting:

"No one will be officially excluded. I know when we used to play five-a-side football it would have changed the whole dynamic if somebody had have been gay on either team. I don't think we would ever have stopped them playing but it certainly would have made a change to the game."

This quotation hints at the very subtle manner in which LGB people may face exclusion in sports. They may not be stopped from playing but they may upset the existing culture on a team, changing the "dynamic".

Fourthly, some people focussed their answers on changing rooms/showers as a barrier: an unwelcoming attitude to gay people in sport could arise from people's unwillingness to have a

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homosexual person in these areas. A 29 year-old man who had played in a variety of soccer teams commented:

“You segregate men and women in changing rooms because they’re different sexes and so there’s not any hanky panky going on and some people might think well I don’t want a homosexual man looking at me in that way. But at the end of the day people are people and just get on with it. So that’s my attitude and I know it’s not everyone’s attitude. There’s always going to be some amount of barriers.”

A 32 year-old woman remarked: “Maybe people wouldn’t feel comfortable with them being in a changing room or whatever, you know. I’m not saying that’s right or wrong, I suppose it’s just the way a lot of people feel, [they] would be uncomfortable with that.” It was not always clear in these responses whether the interviewee had a problem with LGB people in changing rooms, or whether they were hypothesising about other people. However, at the very least there was clearly some sympathy with people’s reluctance to have LGB people in the changing rooms.

Two people believed LGB people would face barriers to playing sport because the interviewees themselves held negative views of gay and lesbian people. One man, a 71 year-old, said:

“I think they would face barriers from older people like myself who would have a prejudice in those directions. I think my sons, for instance, wouldn’t be so anti, shall we say. I think, because they’re younger, they would have a more positive view of it than I would. But I think it’s my generation who can’t quite get round to accepting this sort of thing.”

Despite this man’s own reservations, he recognises, like the others noted above, that there is increasing acceptance of LGB people among the younger generation. A more frank admission of bias came from this man, a 60 year-old:

**“Do you think lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people would face barriers to playing sport?”**

Yes.

**In what sense?**

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Because I'm totally against them. Well I have to be straight about it, you know. Because there's a different – this probably is going into politics, like, but there's a different set of rules for them and I don't think that's right. I mean, you can't even crack a joke or not mean anything but oh my goodness gracious, you'd be up in court as quick as you can. You know what I mean."

### 3.7.2 LGB perspectives

Although interviews with the general public revealed a range of opinion on this issue, the five LGB respondents painted a less ambiguous picture: for a majority of them, sport was not a comfortable or welcoming environment due to negative attitudes of players and coaches. In the interviews, there were, though, a number of different emphases.

#### *Homophobia*

Most interviewees had experienced homophobia on the sports field and felt that certain team sports had cultures that were hostile to gay people. One man, a 30 year-old, told a story of gradual disengagement from team sports due to a homophobic culture. He is worth quoting at length:

"I was quite sporty, but I suppose I became a teenager and other things began to interest me and I also began to realise at that time I was coming to terms with my sexual orientation and I didn't feel that those were safe environments for gay people. I played Gaelic and soccer in the mid and early 90s and homophobia was rife, common, whether from teachers, coaches, members of the team, spectators and it was never challenged. So I began to feel increasingly uncomfortable in that environment and that's kind of one of – part of the reasons why I stopped playing (...) I remember explicitly one time, I was tall growing up so people began to catch up with me at about 14 or 15, but I was always quite tall. And I was renowned for like crunching tackles. And I remember somebody else tackling me and not tackling me well and the teacher shouting 'tackle him properly you faggot' to the other kid. And just, you know, that's one incident that I remember, but that was part of, you know, a culture, I would say, particularly in the 90s that was never, ever challenged. So that was from teaching staff, but that was regularly used because the conflation of being gay as to not being a real man as to being effeminate – feminine, you know, was something that went against the grain in sport or those particular sports. So that would have been pretty common (...) If I wanted to re-join a team now as an adult, would I have to go back in the closet or would I be welcomed as a gay man? And I still struggle with that consideration."

Another man, 23, was more brief but told a very similar story: "When I came out, the first proper bad experience was within school, 'oh there's a fag in the team'. That was really traumatic." One

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woman, 25, who was originally from outside NI, now played no sport because “when I moved here and tried to get into sports it was like, ‘you’re not welcome’.” She singled out female soccer teams as being “particularly bitchy”. That homophobia is embedded in the everyday language of some team sports was also perceived by this respondent, a 22 year-old:

“‘Man up’ is this bane of my life, the bane of my life is that statement, PE teachers and this statement, ‘man up’. I’m not doing PE. ‘Man up.’ No, I’m not doing it, f\*\*\* off. That was the worst statement of my life, ‘man up’. (...) I don’t think coaches take it seriously either. And the coaches just like ‘oh yeah, yeah, it’s fine. They didn’t mean it, they’re joking.’ And you’re sitting there going but they actually weren’t. I’ve never had a coach like outwardly say anything to me, but if I brought anything to them they’re like oh no, it’s nothing.”

Here again, we have the tendency, in team sports contexts, for sporting prowess to be associated with a particular view of masculinity, something which our general public interviewees also identified as likely to be problematic for LGB people. Those who deviate from a masculinity defined by heterosexuality and physical ability face rejection. In this man’s experience, people in leadership roles propagated a homophobic environment and/or they tacitly permitted such an environment to persist.

### *Changing rooms*

In addition to homophobia, a second obstacle for LGB participation, according to the interviewees, was sports changing rooms. The following quotations (which all refer to interviewee’s sports experience at school) illustrate how a heady mix of their own awkwardness in the changing room, their awareness that they may be making other people awkward, plus verbal abuse from others, made taking part impossible, as the following testimonies show:

“Well I never, ever did PE in school because everyone knew I was gay. It was always the case of like walk into the changing rooms and like everyone back against the wall sort of thing...It was always serious bullying, like, so I never done PE at all at school.” (male, 23).

“I think the wee girls were afraid to get changed in front of me” (female, 25).

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“Like I dropped sports, like you know you have to do PE in school, from like fourth year on it was supposed to be mandatory, I didn't do it. I hated the changing room. It was like the worst thing. I think that's – over anything that stopped me from doing sports at all, it would definitely easily be that. The most awkward situation of your life. I won't even go to a public gym or anything because of – or like a swimming centre or anything. It's just the changing rooms. It's the changing rooms that does it” (male, 22).

In a stark example of exclusion, all of these individuals gave up PE and sports when they came out in school. A couple of the respondents were still too self-conscious to use public leisure facilities and communal changing rooms although the others did not mind, saying that as long as people did not know they were gay, they did not feel awkward or fear abuse or avoidance.

### *Making sports inclusive*

Taking the problem of changing facilities first, interviewees said that such places would be much less intimidating if they allowed for more privacy:

“Yeah, like I will go swimming, I don't know if you're familiar with the swimming pools around here, but I would go to [names leisure centre], but it's like totally out in the open, like if you're getting changed there's no little, you know, cubicles or anything. See I think cubicles are better” (female, 25).

“They should get rid of them like. I know you have to get changed, but like seriously, changing rooms, they don't even have cubicles in them in them like. They should be completely redesigned. Because any changing rooms that I ever had was literally just a room with benches in it and opposite... If like people know you're gay and they're like changing in front of you and they're like oh ‘she's trying to look at me’” (male, 22).

This call for redesigned changing rooms/showers that allow for greater privacy dovetails closely with the perspective of transgender people.

Secondly, what did interviewees think could be done to address homophobia in sport? One man was pessimistic:

“Simple answer is there's nothing that can be done about it really. At the end of the day,

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everyone has their own attitudes and that's the way they're going to be. There's nothing you can really do to stop it" (male, 23).

However, the first interviewee quoted in this section spoke articulately of the need for a public awareness campaign around homophobia and sport, believing that such an enterprise had yet to be attempted. Soccer had failed, he thought, to move beyond its focus on addressing community relations to reach out to the LGB community:

"And I like the way that it's [the IFA's community relations programme] called Football for All. And I've seen some of the posters and imagery but none of it appears – none of it says anything to me as a gay man that this sport is inclusive of me. I know the huge move has been about breaking down sectarian barriers and that's kind of one of the primary focuses, but there has been inclusive elements of black minority ethnic communities and different racial communities. Where is the inclusivity for me as a gay man? I don't see it" (male, 30).

He highlighted that there is a practical as well as moral imperative to make sports more inclusive: it expands the pool of talent available.

We noted some LGB people found that sport – especially at school – could be an oppressive environment in which gender expectations were enforced and the less talented players were marginalised. Transgender people also found this, as did a number of our general public interviewees. Some respondents expressed a desire for greater flexibility in school sport (i.e. a wider variety of sports on offer, catering for a range of different abilities), something which could lead to higher participation in school sports, greater enjoyment of sport throughout life, and enhanced fitness and self-esteem. For instance, a 23 year-old man said exclusion from team sports had put him off looking after his health for many years; he wished that there had been more options to take part in individual sports or fitness training at school.



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### 3.7.3 Summary

On the whole, among the interviews with members of the general public, there was uncertainty about this issue – some believed that sports participation could be challenging for gay people, while others did not. Some perceived that the position of LGB people in NI society was improving, while others thought that Northern Ireland continued to be a ‘cold house’ for LGB people and this would inevitably manifest itself in sport. Testimony from LGB interviewees confirms the views of general public interviewees that the heavily gendered nature of certain team sports and the idea that ‘real’ masculinity entails sporting competence creates a culture which is highly conducive to homophobia. Moreover, the view expressed by some general public interviewees that certain heterosexual people would be uncomfortable with a gay person in a changing room is confirmed by the experiences of LGB interviewees: open plan changing rooms and showers are intimidating places for LGB people, in part because they afford no privacy and in part because they lend themselves to bullying.

What is perhaps most striking is how few general public interviewees had experience of openly gay people in sport. Thus, while the finding that so many people did not believe gay people would face barriers may appear encouraging, this must be balanced with the fact that few people had encountered openly gay sports people or had even thought much about the subject. In addition, some interviewees expressed openly hostile attitudes to LGB individuals, thereby exemplifying some of the problems this group face. It seems likely that many LGB people conceal their sexuality in sporting contexts, or avoid them altogether. For the LGB interviewees, negative experiences of sport/changing rooms put them off participation in sport in the long term and made them uncertain about how they would fare if they took part again (some general public interviewees acknowledged this: LGB people may face the barrier of perception – an expectation of exclusion).

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## 3.8 Transgender people

This section is based on interviews with five transgender people (three females and two males, all mid or post-transition). Given that the transgender community is a small and vulnerable group, and there are particular sensitivities around anonymity, interviewees are identified simply as F1, F2, F3, M1 and M2, with ‘M’ and ‘F’ indicating their acquired gender. From the narratives of this group four main themes emerged: *early sports experiences* at school and the sharp sense of being different that these caused; the challenge of *using changing rooms*; the difficulties of *being in public* and the impact on their ability to be active; and the *overall impact of their exclusion from sport*.

### 3.8.1 Early experiences: sport and the sense of ‘being different’

All participants reported that their sense of gender dysmorphia began in early childhood. For example: “You tend to know from around, I think the age of three,” said M2, ‘you know there’s something wrong here and you, you can’t, you can’t put your finger on it.” Similarly, F2 recalled:

“When I was five someone asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up and I said, ‘a girl’ ‘cause you’re told at such a young age you can be whatever you want to be when you grow up and I said a girl and people started laughing at me.”

Interviewees’ earliest memories of sport were at school, and it emerged that school sports provoked particularly acute feelings of gender dysmorphia. There were several reasons for this. One was simply the enforced gender segregation in school sport; as M1 said, “I was friends with all boys and I was going, why am I not over there? And I kept getting put over here with this lot and you know it’s just not right.” A second problem was the requirement to get changed and showered in front of others – others who were, of course, regarded as being of a different sex (we explore this further

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below). Thirdly, the females reported feeling that they were not as proficient as the males with whom they had to compete at school. This led to judgement from others, not being picked for teams and so on, and this again strengthened their feelings of being different. As F3 iterated:

“The first time that I ever felt comfortable in a sport was athletics and that’s because it was individual and I could be me in here and no one could guess, you know, what’s going on inside.”

This feeling that the team sports environment was somewhat oppressive and excluding, was felt by other participants, although this is of course not a perspective unique to transgender people. “It felt like going to a concentration camp when I had to do PE”, noted F2, and she highlighted what she saw as the invidious role played by teachers in enforcing expectations around sport at school:

“Teachers exclude you in a way too. Teachers exclude you in a way when you’re younger because they’re like ‘oh, oh you’re useless at this’ or, or they try and force you to do a sport or force you to do PE. I mean like it should be optional ’cause there’s a plethora of different reasons why people wouldn’t want to go in to a changing room.”

Uniquely in this group, M1 had a very positive experience of sport at school, excelling at various activities, but felt particular discomfort at the gender specific uniforms: “I mean I wasn’t the only one that didn’t wanna wear a skirt playing hockey.”

### **3.8.2 Changing rooms: a problematic environment**

Discomfort with communal changing rooms was by far the greatest barrier to these participants taking part in sport. Any activity that required using communal changing rooms/showers was simply impossible. There were three elements to this discomfort. Firstly, if the person had not yet transitioned and they were required to use the changing room of their physical sex, they felt that it was wrong to do so:

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“I got to the stage I wouldn’t, couldn’t go to the gym anymore because I felt I was violating everybody else in the changing room ’cause I’m a guy and like everybody else, a woman. And I thought I was violating them, I felt wrong, it totally put me off going to the gym (...) I want to join a gym at the moment and I’m looking at gyms and going, does that have communal showers in it, you know it’s a big thing. It’s huge” (M1).

Secondly, undressing in communal changing rooms can cause embarrassment to the transgender person and/or discomfort or shock in others. Participants highlighted the particular problem around children:

“You see there’s the child issue in that, you know, if someone sees someone during transition or who hasn’t really transitioned very well and they start screaming, ‘there’s man in here’. And staff aren’t trained to deal with it properly...” (M2)

Although the focus of our research was sport, M2 pointed out that a more frequently faced problem for transgender people than changing rooms was public toilets. Experience in such places did not encourage transgender people to venture into sports changing facilities:

“Without even having to go to the changing room, people know what will happen because they’ll go to the bathroom, a public bathroom, and when a woman screams and runs out and shouts ‘there’s a man in here’, you know, well forget about the changing room, I can’t even go to the bathroom. And when you go and someone has a, a look, if you’re trying to go to the gents, so you, you know before you even need to go to the changing room [there will likely be a problem].”

In relation to changing rooms, transgender people are placed in a Catch 22 situation by the demands of the transitioning process. They are required to live as their desired sex for two years in order to ‘prove’ themselves, before the physical changes – hormones, surgery – can take place, yet the risk of embarrassment and/or complaints (or being banned by staff) makes this very difficult:

“That period of my actual transition, it’s called the ‘real life experience’, where you have to live totally in role, as they call it for, for that period. But that’s our most vulnerable period really because we’re neither one thing nor the other. Because we can’t get officially recognised” (F3).

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F1 gave an illustration of the difficulty of being neither “one thing nor the other”. Shortly before beginning the transitioning process, she had told the staff at her local gym that she would soon be changing her name and arriving as a woman. She asked if she could use the female changing area but was told her only option was to use the disabled facilities; “That was a bit of a downer right away so I actually didn’t go back.” Participants said that the challenges of this two year period meant that people simply withdrew from many activities, including sport and exercise. A third barrier to using changing rooms was the sense of ‘mystery’ surrounding them and a lack of knowledge of the etiquette of using them:

“Then there’s the fact as well that we’ve never been socialised in them changing rooms. So after, after everything’s over and all that, we’d still feel uncomfortable going in there because we’ve never, we’ve never had that like. The guys changing rooms at school you know, we’ve never experienced that” (M1).

The solution to these problems, as strongly asserted by the respondents, was to provide changing rooms and showers consisting entirely of cubicles. It was highlighted how all-cubicle changing rooms would also save transgender people from drawing attention to themselves as they presently do when using one of the small number of cubicles that are usually available in communal changing rooms. Interviewees were asked if they understood the unease people may feel at encountering them in a changing room. They responded unanimously that they did, and that their desire not to upset others was as great a consideration in their avoidance of changing rooms as their own unease. Unsurprisingly, given these problems associated with undressing in changing rooms, none of our participants used swimming pools or had done for many years. This was a source of considerable regret for some.

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### 3.8.3 Recreation and the problems of appearing in public

Given the difficulties that the enclosed environment of a changing room presents for transgender people, we may think that at least they can participate in individual or outdoor leisure activities that do not require using shared facilities. This is not the case. Simply venturing out in public is fraught with difficulty. For example, on a walk at a well-known beauty spot near Belfast, two of the participants had, that week, been verbally abused by drunk people. Respondents spoke at length of how this dramatically constrains the range of sport and physical recreation that is available to them. “Even the simplest, gentlest, which is walking,” said M2, “walking for us can be a problem ’cause you must think where you’re gonna walk and who you might meet.” F3 told of how she had recently hiked up a particular mountain, a climb she had not done for thirty years. The experience made her determined to start walking again and try to regain the fitness levels she had once had, but, she said:

“The reality is somewhat different. I live in a village and there’s no way that I can leave my front door and start to go out walking and there’s some beautiful walks around our village. But I, you know, I just couldn’t do that.”

All respondents talked of the huge amount of thinking and planning required in any outing, and the anxiety and paranoia that they often feel in contemplating an excursion:

“It’s usually the fear of something happening that stops you doing it, you know, so you have to think of every scenario and you work through it in your head and it becomes this massive thing, you know” (M1).

“A lot of the time you have yourself murdered and pitchforked – for everything, not just going to sports or anything” (F2).

Another factor that dissuaded respondents from going out was the considerable amount of time and effort required to prepare their appearance, although this varied from person to person. It was felt

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that male transgender people had less difficulty in this area than females, who had to contend with facial hair and make-up. As F2 said, “a genetic female can just get up and put on a pair of tracksuit bottoms and just go out into the world with her hair tied up. But we spend like four hours just to look normal.”

Anxiety around being in public spaces was not simply due to the fear of ridicule or rejection, but also the fear of being recognised. M1 said:

“For me personally I grew up in Belfast and I’m working now, but it’s a nightmare because you worry about who’s gonna come in the door, it’s so small, everybody knows each other. You don’t wanna be the local gossip you know. Because I went to uni over in [deleted] and I fully intend to return there you know ’cause it’s just easier. Going down the street and you don’t have to worry. But my main worry is being in a gym changing room, and do you know my ex-primary school teacher or something, ’cause people do recognise you (...) I’m in a job, nobody knows about me, they don’t know about my past. And I don’t want them to find out ’cause they do treat you differently.”

Interviewees stressed that they never did anything as a group in public such as go out to a restaurant as it tended to draw attention to them. M2: “They could maybe go, ‘is she or isn’t she?’ But if she’s with someone else, they go, ‘oh they are’. That confirms it.” They would only feel comfortable going out as a group if they did not fear recognition. On a recent trip to another town the group had had a picnic in a public park. They stressed this was highly unusual and only happened because they felt anonymous and hence safe.

Fear of being around other people also, of course, made the respondents very reluctant to attend sports events. For example, F2 said:

“I couldn’t go to a sports event like going to see football or something. I’d imagine that I was gonna get burned or something. I would have a panic attack surrounded by all those men, all shouting and... People have a knack of making you feel excluded like if they catch on to your difference, they pull their child away like you’re a sex offender or something and that makes you feel excluded going to them kind of things.”

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F3 said she would feel comfortable attending a rugby match, but would not go to a soccer or GAA match, stating: “I have no proof but I just don’t think I would be welcome there.” She enjoyed canoeing but said she felt she could not join a club. It was even hard to get the opportunity to watch the sport she loved:

“Less than a month ago, we were supposed to have a meeting up here in Belfast and my previous meeting finished earlier and I went out to [deleted] where the canoeing course is because I just yearned to, to commune with people there. But even there I had to sit in the car because I was frightened to go out and even walk along the tow path and because there were a lot of people there and you know I, I couldn’t even get out into the fresh air and you know savour watching people on the river or even you know, that was just sort of by proxy enjoying the sport really. But I couldn’t even do that because I felt I was drawing attention to myself.”

### 3.8.4 The impact of sports exclusion

The consequence of these experiences is that transgender people are denied the social, health and wellbeing benefits that accrue from taking part in sport and exercise. Interviewees stressed the generally poor state of transgendered people’s physical and mental health and highlighted the vicious circle they face: suffering the psychological stress of gender dysmorphia and transition, withdrawing from exercise and socialising and then coming under greater psychological stress because they cannot enjoy the therapeutic effects of those activities:

“It would be fair to say most of us would want to do sport. And it would be the best thing for us, particularly in that difficult stage [transition] you know. Yeah, you know our life experience really makes us anxious and depressed and the best thing for that is exercise and to release the endorphins and get the serotonin levels up” (M2).

“You know like, like for me you’re talking about the effects on, on your mental health; running was the only safe space I ever had, canoeing fulfilled that thing as well. I mean going down a river on, on an autumn morning. The mist just on the river and you see kingfishers fishing and yeah the, the effect that that does have on your physical and mental wellbeing cannot be imagined” (F3).



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They also noted that it is important to be in good physical shape for transition surgery and this can be difficult without options for exercise.

Non-participation in sport also impacted upon the interviewees' relationships. Above we noted participants' unwillingness to be seen as a group in public. F3 remarked that she could never, for example, imagine booking a pitch for their group to play five-a-side football. Thus, these transgender people are denied the camaraderie, enjoyment and relationship-building of playing sport and attending sports events together. Sports exclusion also put constraints on forming relationships with others. M1 mentioned his fear of taking up invitations to play sports with non-transgender colleagues at work, partly because they may be 'discovered' and partly because of awareness that their skills at sport would be far less than the others because they have not played for so long: "it would really mark you out," said M1. F1 described the following dilemma she was facing in relation to the prospect of a family holiday:

"I have a daughter that is special needs and I would love, really, really love to take her away this year on holiday with me. She's already been away with her mum and there's a big 'if' hanging over it and the 'if' is she can't grasp calling me anything else but daddy. Because of her disability she can't sort of grasp hold of certain things and she constantly when I'm out with her calls me daddy and we've tried to, you know do, get her to change it and she can't find it in herself. So it would be a bit strange if, if she come out with it in front of the wrong people and 'daddy' and people are looking at me and going, and 'this doesn't tally, something's not right here'. It, it wouldn't be, it might cause problems that would be, you know hard to deal with or abroad. Do you know, say at a swimming pool or something like that or if I was even to be there with her, she calls me 'daddy' and I'm sitting there and has, even that not in the swimming pool but as a spectator looking on, looking after her, it could cause problems. But that's a different kettle of fish altogether, but it's just something that it is, is on my mind at the minute (...) I would love to take her away, my other daughter is in [deleted] and I'd love to take her over to see her, you know."

Overall, it was clear how the unavailability of sport and physical recreation reduced opportunities for forming and enhancing relationships with others.

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### 3.8.5 Summary

In other parts of this Report, we have noted that the strict gender boundaries within sports and the manner in which sports transmit rigid ideas of masculinity and femininity can be experienced as excluding and overbearing by people who do not conform to stereotypical ideas of gender. It follows that transgender people – those who have wholly rejected the gender into which they were born – are the greatest casualties of this and their difficulties begin at an early age. As we saw, the male-female divisions in school sports brought on intense feelings of gender dysmorphia. Before, during or after transition, transgender people struggle to find a place in a sports world (changing facilities, teams and competition categories) characterised by male-female segregation. Yet it is not simply the nature of sport that makes physical recreation difficult; the lack of public understanding of transgender people means that any activity in public is difficult.

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## 3.9 Minority ethnic groups

In this part of the interviews, respondents were asked: “Do you think people from ethnic minority groups face barriers to taking part in sport in Northern Ireland?” First, we explore the views of our main group of interviewees in relation to this question. Secondly, we examine the perspectives of ethnic minority participants.

### 3.9.1 General public perspectives

Most interviewees did not regard ethnic minorities as facing serious barriers to sports inclusion, although there were some contrary views. There were three key themes in interviewees’ responses: the perception that *no barriers exist*; the recognition of *communication barriers*; and the belief that some *prejudice against ethnic minorities is a barrier in sports*.

#### *No barriers*

At the outset it is worth noting an overall impression gained by the researchers: most respondents had little to say about this topic, few had experience of playing alongside ethnic minorities, and the issue did not appear to be one to which they had given much thought. A few people simply stated that they could not answer this question, having no experience, knowledge or even impressions of the issue. In this respect, this strand of the research resembled responses in relation to LGB people and sport. A 21 year-old man, who played golf, pointed out that racism was not a problem in his sport, though he was also aware that there were few black players in the sport:

“Depends what sport ’cause at least with golf, I don’t think it matters. Like you’re not going to get much black people playing golf. You’re not going to get much – in fact, you wouldn’t get much racism in golf, would be unheard of.”

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It was unclear whether he understood the contradiction between a lack of racism and the absence of black players.

Several interviewees suggested that individual ethnic minority group members may perceive a barrier which is not there. These responses from three women illustrate this:

“I think it depends on the person. Sometimes you can create the barrier for yourself. I think if you look around Northern Ireland at the minute and look at various sporting activities there are a lot of ethnic minorities, there are people from ethnic minorities taking part in those clubs, they’ve been welcomed into them. Likewise there probably are lots of people who are not taking part who maybe feel that they wouldn’t be welcomed, it’s maybe a perceived barrier. So, no, I think it maybe depends on the person” (female, 60).

“I don’t think they should face any problems, but I guess they could again feel not very welcome if they were really the only person and they don’t feel like they fit in or something like that” (female, 19).

“I think that it’s very hard for them to be involved but maybe not so much that sport is keeping them away. It might be more them and how they feel about coming” (female, 29).

Two people said that Muslim women and girls would face barriers because of their religion’s constraints on what sports clothing they can wear.

### *Communication barriers*

A number of interviewees suggested that the barriers to taking part in sport would be the same ones ethnic minorities face when trying to partake in other activities; their difficulties were not confined to sport. For example, language barriers:

“Yeah. I mean, they – outside of their own communities, I’m sure it’s tough to go out and find a group and be a part of something, when it’s difficult – day to day life is – there are barriers there, at school, communication barriers” (female, 25).

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“Language barrier might be an issue. The colloquialisms at a football game!” (male, 52).

A 22 year-old man whose dance club had some Eastern European members suggested that children from ethnic minorities would find it easier to take part in sport than older people since they would have opportunities through school or hear about them through school friends. A few people said that ethnic minorities may find it difficult to take part in sport because, as a 38 year-old man said, “They might struggle more as they just might not have the avenues for their particular sport in Northern Ireland”. A 30 year-old man, who taught an English language class to non-Northern Irish people, claimed his students had found it difficult finding somewhere to play volleyball and handball. A 41 year-old man suggested that the degree to which ethnic minorities participated in sports would depend on the extent to which their particular communities had integrated generally:

“If they’re not really integrating or they can’t speak the language or they keep within their own community. A big example of that would be the Chinese community who’ve moved here and keep within their own community and wouldn’t move outside that. I think that’s more of a barrier than any sort of obstruction put in their way from people in a club.”

### *Prejudice against ethnic minorities as a barrier*

A small number of people did believe Northern Ireland to be an unwelcoming place for ethnic minorities and felt this would inevitably manifest itself in sport:

“We’re not the most welcoming country when it comes to people that are different. We don’t even get on with ourselves. So I’d say that yeah, they probably do. Like I have family down in Dungannon like, and there’s a lot of people who moved there, you know, that come from Portugal and all those – and I wouldn’t have said it would be too easy to just rock up and go, ‘I’m going to join the football team’. And just because it’s quite a racist kind of town anyway” (female, 27).

“It think so, yes I do just because of the stereotypical kind of view and obviously because a lot of them I think have come in to Northern Ireland just recently and they’re kind of mind-set is still that they’re taking our jobs sort of thing. So that kind of just spirals all those things” (female, 23).

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“Well again roughly going back to it’s a level of acceptance. I mean we have a particularly poor record here. We were never racist until people actually came into this country. We were only sectarian until that happened. You can see that reflected in attitudes to the Romany community and various other ones as well. So yeah I would have thought if people picked up on that they would have difficulty” (male, 42).

One 21 year-old man said that a friend of his had been racially abused by players on the opposing team during a Gaelic football match. Two people, a 27 year-old woman and a 32 year-old man, noted that attitudes to ethnic minorities may vary from area to area.

Two interviewees explicitly articulated intolerance toward ethnic minorities and expressed the view that they were advantaged, rather than disadvantaged. A 60 year-old man said that he did not believe ethnic minorities faced barriers to participating in sport and indeed argued that it was the indigenous citizens who were being discriminated against. He asserted:

“I think they get more sport than what the Irish people get. Now, I've nothing against different races or whatever, but they let you know, ‘we're being discriminated against.’ We're fighting for this because we're in the UK. The UK people can't say, ‘Oh well, I'm getting discriminated going to their club.’ They would just turn round and say, ‘Well, you shouldn't be here.’ So I think the UK people are getting discriminated but can't do anything about it. And I think the other minority of people get away with murder.”

This man, though, did not give any concrete examples to back up his claims. A 52 year-old man made similar comments:

“The IFA themselves, hmm, they say, ‘Kick out racism,’ but I don't think they do enough. I think there's a deep down issue there. And that's not with white people. I think that's with the coloureds because, if they don't get their way, they say it's racist. And racism, in my view now, has turned the other way. I've got a friend who works as a bus driver. He is racially abused five times a day on the buses. He cannot put a complaint in. But if he was coloured, they'd want him to put a complaint in and he'd get compensation. But because he's white, he doesn't. He's the minority now. So I think a lot of people use it falsely for their own benefit, and I think that's worse. They're the ones that aren't helping their own people.”

Several interviewees, all men who had played team sports throughout their lives, agreed that it was

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likely that someone of a different race or ethnicity may face abuse on the sports field, but were unsure about how genuine or serious this abuse was; it was just part and parcel of the abuse that gets thrown around at everyone in sport. A 38 year-old man commented:

“Playing football on a Saturday afternoon on some of those pitches is not a pleasant place to be and I imagine if you were gay or an ethnic minority it’d be even less pleasant because you’d probably pick up more abuse. But lots of abuse goes on for everybody, but again... If I come back to, if they’re on your team and they’re contributing then you’ll stand up for them.”

A 42 year-old man acknowledged the problem, mentioning recent publicised incidents of racial abuse at GAA matches, but concluded: “There’s dickheads in the crowd no matter where you go, that’s just life.” Another former GAA player, a 34 year-old, wondered whether racial abuse was genuine or simply a strategy to distract the opposition:

“I think there’s an element of racial abuse possible that creeps in and I think it does happen. I don’t know if it’s necessarily a barrier but anybody who’s involved in sport, I think there’s time they can lose their temper and they’ll say the first thing that’s in their head. Whether it’s a ‘fat so and so’ or ‘you’re this’. If it’s somebody’s colour they’ll say it. I don’t necessarily know if they’re being racist it’s just, I think the one thing that differentiates them.”

Nonetheless, this respondent concluded: “I think it can definitely impact them getting involved over life.”

### 3.9.2 Minority ethnic group perspectives

Ethnic minority interviewees included: one male and one female Chinese, a male Pakistani Muslim man, four Indian men, a Polish woman, a Zanzibari man, and a Korean-American woman. Four main themes emerged: *positive experiences of sport in NI*; the fact that *the sports preferred and*

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*played by immigrants can be different to those available in NI; the challenges posed to ethnic minorities by the sectarian divide in sport and; experiences of racism.*

### *Positive experiences of sport in NI*

Despite the fact that interviewees were conscious of certain obstacles to taking part in sport in NI, there were, among the ethnic minority sample, various examples of unproblematic participation in sport and physical activity. The Chinese and Polish interviewees, and one of the Indians, regularly used public leisure centres. The man from Zanzibar had played football with work colleagues. The Pakistani interviewee and one of the Indians had played for local cricket clubs. Moreover, there were also some strongly supportive views regarding the social benefits of sport and the potential of sport to help integrate different communities. For instance, one of the Indian men, a community worker, was involved in a number of initiatives including late night basketball and cricket aimed at steering young people away from anti-social behaviour. The Pakistani Muslim interviewee made the following remarks on the unifying power of sport:

“Sport’s the best way, I think, to bring the community together... Sport doesn’t keep people away from each other, you know. I mean, we need somebody who bring this community together, become a bridge between them, you know, work on something. I mean, I’m – as I mentioned earlier, I think sports is the best way to bring the communities together. I mean, if you say let’s Christian and Muslim pray together, I don’t think so, no way. But if you say let’s Pakistani Muslim team and Christian team here play cricket, there’s no problem. So sport is the best way to eradicate, if any racism or element of hate or something, like you know, to bring the people together.”

In this respondent’s view, sport is an equaliser, an uncontroversial way of uniting people who may disagree on other matters but can come together in the common purpose of playing sport.

### *Differences in the sports played by ethnic groups*

The Chinese woman noted that an immediate barrier to the inclusion of ethnic minorities in NI sport may be the fact that the sports that are played and that are popular in NI may simply be unfamiliar:



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“I think for certainly ethnic minorities, particularly people coming from developing countries, from the Far East, a lot of the sports are not familiar to them. So say well I came from in Hong Kong we would do football, we know about football, the boys would play football. (...) Swimming is a big thing in Hong Kong. But, you know, all the other sports, certainly when I was growing up, you know, that we have in wealthy Western countries would not have been very familiar. So it is really introducing them, you know, that you can do whatever, you know, aerobics or whatever, you know, different things, or mountain biking and things. And then if people come from the cities, a lot of the countryside sports are not familiar to them. Angling, not that I ever support people angling and things, it’s a just stupid hobby. You know, angling, boating, yachting, kayaking, you know, to do with the water sport. If you live a busy city, you know, from India or from the Far East, you don’t have those opportunities or experiences or knowledge. So it is about I think introducing to them the whole range of sports that we have, that they may never have heard of.”

For this participant an important element of enabling ethnic minorities to participate in sport is communication: “It is really letting them know, giving them information and maybe have even taster initiatives that they, you know, can go at different things and see.” This interviewee pointed out that this is especially relevant for first generation immigrants; second or third generation immigrants do not have such difficulties since they encounter local sports at school and also have better English. In terms of sporting preferences, the Muslim man highlighted the fact that Pakistanis and Indians prefer cricket to football, the latter being by far the preference of people in NI.

### *The challenge of negotiating the sectarian divide in NI sport*

Ethnic minority interviewees were aware of the political/religious divide in NI and that sport was one of the many things that labelled people as being from one side of the community or the other. The Chinese woman commented: “Particularly if they [ethnic minorities] live in a certain area, they don’t want to be wearing whatever [sports] top.” The Muslim man made the following comments about the sectarian divide:

“So I mean, who we are? We are Catholic and we are Protestant, which side we go, you know? Because of the conflict which ran about 25 years or more, and so always the two main communities come in the mind, like Catholic and Protestant, always working on them, you know, so if you compare with the mainland, we slightly left behind. And maybe people from ethnic minority backgrounds or Muslim background, maybe are a little bit reluctant to get involved, sometimes, in sports or to use facilities. Again, as I say – thinking like where you mention earlier, Catholic and Protestant, do we fit in? Will they accept us? Because

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always worried about them, you know. One fear is if you play with the Catholics, were the Protestants going to mind? And if you play with the Protestant team, are the Catholic going to mind? You understand what I mean?”

He makes two important points here. One is that he believes the conflict in NI and the focus on the two-community issue have held back the acceptance and inclusion of ethnic minorities; Great Britain, he suggests, is further ahead in this regard. Secondly, he notes the reluctance of ethnic minorities to engage with NI sport due to the fact that this may imply a preference for one or other community.

A few participants identified practical barriers such as time, language and money as factors which impacted on the ability of ethnic minority communities to engage in sport. “You're working to survive,” said one of the Indians, highlighting the fact that playing sport is simply not a priority for many immigrants. He went on:

“You're starting off from scratch, your house, your children born. Like you get the Polish and other people come here, and they're good enough footballers, we started a football club, we played a tournament, but it was difficult for them to continue because they were working twelve hours a day and things.”

He also pointed out the problems of language: “It's very difficult because some sports players want to play sport and don't have a language, that's a barrier for them. And it'll be difficult when you can't communicate.” The Chinese man pointed to the barrier that can affect poorer people from all groups in society, cost: “It's expensive, you know, for a swim is what, £3 or £4?”

### *Experiences of racism*

Most ethnic minority interviewees had experienced some degree of racism, some within sporting contexts and some outside. One of the Indians had worked at a sports club but he believed he had lost his job due to racism:

“I was the general manager in [names sports club]. I ran the club, it had bar and cricket,

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football, tennis, bowls, (...) But one day the company[that owned the club] changed, and suddenly they didn't want a black man to run that. And then I had a lot of hassles, I faced letters to 'go home' and 'we don't want you'. So that was when eventually they sacked me and all that, so it was tough at that time. Though I have a family and all, to recover, to recoup, I had to go back to India for a couple of months. You know, so that was a nasty thing. But again, it's a handful of people have done it, for greediness and other things."

This interviewee also said that he had applied for several sports development jobs in NI, jobs which he was more than qualified for, but had not got them. He perceived that there were institutional barriers preventing ethnic minorities from reaching the upper echelons of sport. He further stressed the importance of anti-racism training for sports coaches and players:

"The governing bodies must give the coaches that awareness of racial discrimination and racial – and language, when the coaches use, it's very important. Because you can use so many things which might hurt, you know, that's very important. And they might not do it, they might just do it with ignorance, you never know, so it's better to put the things out there and train them better. Training, training, training and awareness is very important. Language is very important. And you know our mind-set in Northern Ireland is only to sectarianism still, you haven't seen the broader picture, so that's what you have to do, because it's becoming so multicultural at the minute."

Respondents also related instances of racism which occurred outside of sporting contexts, which are important to mention here since they may colour perceptions of sports. The Muslim respondent felt there was considerable Islamophobia in NI, whipped up by simplistic impressions transmitted through the media: "Anything happen anywhere, straight blame comes to the Muslims, and everybody thinks that all the Muslims are terrorists, all the Muslims are suicide [bombers]." He was also critical of one of the common negative perceptions of immigrants: "When I see the news, they say the foreigners stealing our jobs, you know, thing like that, you know. I could not believe it because what I know as majority of the Indians and Pakistanis are businessmen." The man from Zanzibar had attended a Twelfth Night bonfire out of interest. He said he was made welcome and had no problems, but was racially abused on the street walking home. The Polish woman, who had worked in schools, had been told in one Belfast school that she was not wanted there. The Korean-American woman said that she had until recently attended a gym in Belfast city centre. Walking

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there took her through an inner city estate and one day she noticed a sign in a house window saying ‘foreigners not welcome.’ She reflected: “If I had been at home in the States I probably could have judged whether this was a serious threat, or nothing to worry about, but because it was here I didn’t want to take any chances.” As a result she stopped attending the gym.

### 3.9.3 Summary

Ethnic minorities remain a relatively small proportion of the population of NI which may explain the lack of awareness of this topic among general public interviewees. Nonetheless, interviewees recognised that ethnic minorities would face challenges to engaging in sport, mainly challenges which were not limited to sports participation but pertained to integrating generally into NI society. These include language barriers, knowledge of sports available, and prejudice, though it was also pointed out that the competitive environment of sport may be particularly susceptible to abuse based on difference. Some conjectured that ethnic minorities might perceive a barrier which is not real. We may infer what might create this perception: for example, media reports of racism in NI, a lack of knowledge about local sports, a lack of personal confidence, or indeed having experienced racism outside of sport and so generalising from this to the sporting context. But in any case, the barrier is thought to reside with the individuals themselves, not with the sports or the people playing them.

Ethnic minority interviewees reported a wide range of views and experiences. Several had positive experience of sport, but common too were experiences of racism, both in sporting contexts and elsewhere. The sectarian divide was daunting for ethnic minorities to navigate, again, both in relation to sport and in other areas. The fact that the sports preferences of people from NI and from other countries could be incompatible was highlighted, yet so too was the potential for common

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sporting interests to act as a bridge between people of differing ethnicities.

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## 3.10 Sport and communication

As part of our aim of assessing people's experiences of the inclusivity or exclusivity of sports in NI, we sought to gauge how people received, and perceived, communication from sporting organisations. Communication issues arose in response to other questions, but two specific questions on this topic were asked. The first was: "Are you aware of any efforts – programmes, schemes or initiatives – on the part of organisations responsible for organising sport that are aimed at breaking down barriers and becoming more inclusive to the types of people we have been discussing?" Secondly, interviewees were asked: "Which sporting organisations communicate well with you and why, and which do not and why?" We explore answers to each question in turn.

### 3.10.1 Awareness of sports inclusion initiatives

A small number of people could not answer this question, having no awareness or experience of sports inclusion efforts, but the others referred to a range of initiatives run by various organisations at both local and NI level. However, knowledge of specific programmes was often patchy and vague, and gained through the media or second-hand sources. The best known efforts at sports inclusion were the IFA's *Football for All* and work carried out by *local authority Councils and leisure centres*. Individual interviewees knew of various other sports-based peacebuilding efforts, as well as outreach carried out by sports themselves.

In terms of specific initiatives, the IFA's Football for All campaign was the most frequently mentioned. This is unsurprising given that soccer is the highest profile sport and Football for All has engendered considerable publicity. In addition, of course, as the following interviewees hinted

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at, Football for All's high profile is partly due to the considerable scale and profile of the problems it was designed to address:

"I know in football they're trying to cut down on what's sung from the terraces, you know they're trying to make it less sectarian. So yes I'm aware of that. They're saying we don't want any racial abuse shouted from the stands, not just religious stuff. But football probably has in most people's eyes, probably the most work to do" (male, 39, Protestant).

"I suppose the one that springs to mind most of all is Northern Ireland football, they've done a lot of good work in terms of tackling sectarianism and I think that's been a big thing, because obviously they have had a problem with it in the past" (male, 41, Catholic).

A small number of people mentioned council-run leisure centres as significant providers of physical activity opportunities to groups which may not have high participation rates. Thus, a 60 year-old Protestant woman commented:

"I know that the local leisure centre here runs various activities for people like myself who suffer from arthritis. Now, I think things like swimming and yoga and those sorts of activities have been sort of laid on for people who would like to try them to see whether or not it helps with their health problems. I mean that's something that's happening here. I really don't know enough about that side of things to say more about them. I do think that Councils are taking initiatives to try to involve people."

A 52 year-old Catholic man noted that "the councils run programmes for over 50s in the leisure centres as well. And they're specially structured for older people." A 57 year-old Catholic woman said:

"Well, you see, I think most of the Councils give an awful lot of information out about all sorts of sport and everybody's allowed to go to the sport no matter what colour you are, no matter what country you come from, which is a good thing. At [names community centre] over there, they have everything there. They have tennis. They have gymnastics. There are those black belt people I told you about, the children there. There's football. There's just all sorts of things over there and I think councils have an awful lot of those all round the country (...) You can walk over, you can look at the posters, see what's on, what night it's on and what time it is, and everybody's welcome."

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Several people were aware of attempts to use sport as a vehicle for peacebuilding, though few had had any personal involvement in such initiatives. For example, this 52 year-old Catholic man commented:

“There are a few interface type things at leisure facilities, and they’re encouraged to, and I don’t know if they play games or whatever, but I know there’s one down there on the [name of road] there’s an interface communal sport area and everyone’s encouraged to use. I’d imagine a lot of the peace funding is aimed at that type of thing.”

A 21 year-old Catholic man knew, “from watching the news and stuff there's sometimes media showing that there's different football programmes of where they get a certain amount of kids from one area and a certain amount from another area and bring them together for football matches.” A 21 year-old Catholic basketball player was familiar with Peace Players, the international organisation which used basketball to bring Protestant and Catholic young people together, while a 45 year-old Protestant woman’s husband had been in a cross-community team when he was a teenager. The role of schools was highlighted by a 65 year-old Protestant man, who said: “A lot of schools now are introducing their pupils to other sports from other traditions.”

A number of people mentioned a variety of outreach activities by sports and sports clubs of which they were aware. A 60 year-old Protestant woman said her local rugby club had “done quite a lot of outreach programmes to encourage children regardless of nationality or whatever.” A 71 year-old Protestant man commented:

“I don't know to what degree, but I've said about my eldest son coaching mini rugby and they actually took it upon themselves to go to the local Roman Catholic primary schools and tried to get the kids interested in playing rugby as opposed to what they would normally do, playing Gaelic in some form or another. So I think that was done off their own back because they thought it would be a good move to do that sort of thing and try and get the other tradition involved in it.”

The difficulty in achieving success in such initiatives was also highlighted by this man, who further



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noted that, “they were slightly disappointed with the response that they got.” A 52 year-old Protestant man said that the golf club of which he was a member was doing outreach in an effort to increase the participation of young people – the club professional was visiting primary schools. A 41 year-old Protestant man said that his local tennis club was trying to get children involved by providing opportunities to play free of charge. Although it is perhaps not strictly a sports inclusion initiative, two people mentioned Parkrun, a weekly, free timed run which takes place in various parks across the UK, including NI.

The 29 year-old Protestant female PE teacher was aware of the IFA’s outreach efforts among girls: “I know that’s the sport at the moment through IFA that they’re pushing for a lot of girl’s football. There’s lots of fun tournaments come up and they offer free coaching in schools.” Likewise, a 41 year-old Catholic man mentioned inclusion efforts by the GAA:

“I mean I know when it comes to fundraising and so on the local area where I come from, people of all persuasions will be asked to donate. If there’s a fundraising initiative Protestants will be approached. In terms of particular initiatives, I know at the corporate level, at higher level in the GAA, there’ve been campaigns of inclusivity. You can see it in the TV ads between football matches. You can see people of all hues and colours and descriptions wearing football caps, different ethnic backgrounds. So you can see that’s part of their strategy.”

A 31 year-old woman was involved in basketball team for lesbian and bisexual women. She commented:

“The intention is of having a safe space for women who maybe wouldn’t feel safe just to join a new basketball team. And so I think there’s that’s targeted towards women who might get excluded from other places. And sure enough, a lot of the women that are there, I mean I can’t - I really speak for myself, but from what they told me, I don’t think they’re involved in any other sports and wouldn’t feel very confident to join any other kind of sport perhaps.”

Another woman, also 31, had seen publicity for a fitness programme geared for young mothers.

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### 3.10.2 Communication from sports organisations

The second communication related question was: “Which sports organisations communicate well with you and why, and which do not?” The question was deliberately broad and, as anticipated, provoked a range of perspectives on sports communication. Four main themes emerged: many respondents said there was a *lack of information on local sport opportunities*; it was felt that there was *good communication from leisure centres/Councils*; *new media and online sources* were viewed as important means of accessing information on specific sports; and, *families and schools* were regarded as very influential transmitters of sports habits and information.

#### *Lack of information on local sport*

A number of people responded to this question by highlighting a dearth of information on opportunities at local level to participate in sport. A 60 year-old woman made the following remarks:

“I just think as I say there are lots of opportunities for sports out there but some are not well enough publicised and people don’t know what’s happening. I know that there are people who play football and they go out and play golf and rugby and so on, but even if you ask those people about other activities, you’d probably find that they have got what they’re into but they don’t know about anything else. And it would be nice perhaps to be able to say go to whether a website, probably that’d be the best way of doing it, where people who are responsible for organising, how do you get in contact with that person if I’m interested, could I try that, you know? So sort of get out there and publicise things better, we’re not very good at doing that I think in Northern Ireland.”

There are three points here worth noting. Firstly, the respondent perceives a lack of information and publicity about sport happening in the community. Secondly, she notes that people involved in sport can become locked-in to what is going on within their own activity and be unaware of information on other sports, either because they fail to seek it or because it is not targeted at them. This is a significant observation since, if sports are to become more inclusive and diverse, this will depend

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on communication strategies which extend information channels beyond traditional ‘user’ constituencies. Thirdly, this lady proposes a ‘one-stop’ source of information – a website – which could contain information on the full range of activities available in an area.

A 57 year-old woman commented that there was a leisure centre “a stone’s throw away but I know nothing really about it. I barely know it exists.” A 52 year-old man commented: “I think they’re all pretty poor at it [communication], to tell you the truth. The likes of soccer teams or cricket teams or rugby teams, I never see them, you know, trying to communicate with the public or trying to attract new members.” A 27 year-old woman recounted the difficulties she had had finding sporting opportunities for her six year old son:

“Like there’s a hockey club around there in [names location] and they always do leaflet drops, but you don’t hear from any other ones. You wouldn’t have a clue what’s going on otherwise. Like I would try and find him organisations, there’s actually nothing up here for him at his age. I searched for days, weeks and then I found one little rugby club.”

A 26 year-old woman pointed out the difficulty of starting a new sport: “My partner’s dying to get into rowing. It’s like, how do you get into it? It’s like you’re just going to have go down and ask can I row a boat and see will they let you.”

The point was made by a 32 year-old woman that the obesity crisis increased the importance of better communication by local sports organisations:

“So many ads on TV for crisps and stuff you know you never see a leisure centre saying Sunday morning family pass for £8. You know there’s not like local. You never hear anything like that. You never hear even on the radio like a leisure centre holding a fun day you just never hear of sport being advertised like that. Because every day on the news you hear about something about 20% of six year olds are obese and in ten years’ time it’s going to be 30% and all. You know something simple like even if it’s a half hour class twice a week but there’s just nothing advertised. I just think communication is really bad. The thing now that no adverts for junk food can be on the TV before nine. There’s going to be a lot of advertising freed up before nine o’clock then. Why not then get things like showing kids what sports there are not necessarily in their local area but show people just on adverts of

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them playing tennis or something like that. Our nephews love tennis. [Names nephew] has played it every so often but mostly they enjoy, mostly they do tennis on the Wii then again that's. That's where kids get their sports from these days from the Wii."

### *Good communication from leisure centres/Councils*

Although the one of the respondents quoted in the previous section complained of knowing nothing about her leisure centre, several people, in fact, highlighted leisure centres as being good at communicating. In terms of local sports information, which was not specifically sought out, leisure centres/Councils were the main communicators. This 50 year-old woman made the following complimentary remarks about her local facility:

"I think generally the Councils, I mean we can only speak for [names Council], and I have to say the facilities are good. If you want to get involved there's any number of things you can get involved with, or go and use whatever facilities you want. And I certainly think you're encouraged to do this by the Councils by the pamphlets you get. The Council magazine. Their magazine every quarter, and I would get emails as I'm a member down at the leisure centre, in terms of what's on offer. And you can book online for things in advance."

A 45 year-old woman commented: "The City Council disseminates information about sport that's available to the community. So I do consume their magazine because I find it useful. That, in terms of, you know, what's happening with the Boost, Healthy for Life, I'm aware of all of that." Similarly, a 52 year-old man stated: "The only body that communicates with me about things that were going on would be the local leisure centre. I'm a member of the gym down there and they will let you know of things going on and whatever." Another medium through which Councils communicate was identified by a 26 year-old woman: "Well there's your local free paper that comes through the door, which you'd see like the Council advertising any kind of sport that's going on in the local centres and stuff like that."

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## *New media*

As we have seen, traditional media – newspapers, leaflets, television and magazines – were regarded as important means of sports communication for various interviewees. These media are indiscriminate in that they are sent to everyone, but this means that they are effective at reaching those who are not actually seeking the information. To keep informed about particular sports, however, several interviewees reported that they found social media and on-line sources most effective. This included some older people. A 72 year-old man said:

“I would look at the rugby club site website or even the bowling club’s website now and then. They don’t have my email address! And I’m going to keep it like that. But at our age, we’re not interested anymore. Watching on the TV is fine, it’s nice and warm and dry in here.”

A 42 year-old spoke enthusiastically about the social networking site Twitter as a means to keep abreast of his sports:

“I use Twitter to get the results, continuously. Twitter is f\*\*\*ing beautiful for football. For Gaelic football, I can be at seven or eight games on a Sunday on Twitter and still be doing my work, you know. I follow games score by score and have it from multiple sources for all of the games around the different parts of the country. And if I really wanted to, coming into the championship season, I can follow every game that occurs and every score across it because people are tweeting in with, you know, a score, and it’s constantly updated. And it’s there, it’s instantaneous and within a minute of the whistle blowing, you get the result; and I’m sitting there, and it’s continuous. It’s probably the best way to watch the sport at the moment.”

Thus, for games without traditional live media coverage by TV or radio, Twitter provides instant information, available throughout the world. A 21 year-old perceived increasing use of social media at local level:

“I think if I take the examples of GAA, there’s particular clubs that do communicate well and I’d say there’s more clubs now getting involved in Facebook and Twitter, and the likes of golf, there’s more clubs using Facebook. I do the Facebook page for my golf club.”

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A 41 year-old former GAA player mentioned that many GAA clubs used Teamer, a free, worldwide, online system for organising and communicating to sports teams. A 34 year-old man said that he got most of his sports information from the BBC website and also “from peers on [online] forums.”

### *Communication through schools and families*

Several interviews noted the powerful role that schools and families play in transmitting information about sports. We explored, in the section on sectarianism and sport, the significant role that schools play in organising young people’s sport. A 52 year-old male soccer coach stressed the influence that schools have in determining what sports people play:

“I remember, when I went to school [in England], you played your sport and you played either after school or you played Saturdays, the sport and a match. Over here, they [grammar schools] don't do school football. They do school rugby but they don't do school football, which, to me, is missing the point. So it's left to the volunteers to do it outside of school. You know, I just think schools have got a lot to do with it.”

A 32 year-old woman noted that she had little contact with any sports, and reflected on why this might be:

“I think it maybe depends when you get involved. So like I kind of feel like if I had got more involved in sport in secondary school or at uni you might then be in those kind of communities or groups. Like if you’re in sporting clubs in uni you may find that you automatically keep those kind of things going. And you have those people around you, especially here, if you’re at uni in Belfast and then continue to live in Belfast. Whereas I think if you get a bit older, like in your late 20’s, early 30’s or beyond, like it’s more difficult for a woman to find things to fit into, or to pick up a sport.”

Not being socially networked with others who play sport means one is much less likely to hear about sporting opportunities.

Others highlighted the role of families in passing on an interest in sport, and particular sports. A 28

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year-old woman suggested that this, rather than the media, was the most significant means of communication:

“I suppose that's one part of it isn't it, the whole communication through advertising or whatever. But another part might be, you know, people's experience of it. You know, thinking about football, you know, that very much goes through, you know, comes through families really doesn't it really? Like a father's interested or mother's interested, the child becomes interested and, you know, so that's like more deeply engrained isn't it than advertising or whatever?”

A 71 year-old made the same point: “More often than not, if your father was sporty, interested in sport or played sport, I think the sons inevitably did. I'd not say the same sport, but had that interest and an interest about keeping fit.” A 43 year-old man provided evidence of the ‘keeping it in the family’ phenomenon, as he was currently observing his son ‘inherit’ an interest in football:

“Well I don't follow one [a soccer team] personally, but my wife's brother is a big Liverpool fan, friends of mine are Liverpool fans, and my wee son has already two Liverpool outfits, you know. So it's sort of like - you're not forced but you're persuaded to follow a team, I think.”

### 3.10.3 Summary

While some people had no awareness or experience of sports inclusion efforts, most people could name initiatives designed to tackle sports exclusion run by various organisations at both local and NI level. However, knowledge of specific programmes was often patchy and vague, and gained through the media or second-hand sources. Perhaps unsurprisingly the best known efforts at sports inclusion were the IFA's high-profile Football for All initiative and work carried out by Councils and leisure centres. In respect of the second question concerning how well sports organisations communicated, many respondents lacked knowledge of local sports opportunities although leisure

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centres/Councils were seen as relatively good at communicating. Social media and other online sources were important means of accessing information on specific sports for some people. Families and schools were also seen as influential in communicating sports habits and information.



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## 3.11 Sport: positive or negative?

We attempted to gauge people's overall impressions of the contribution and potential contribution of sport to social inclusion by asking two questions: "Overall, do you think sport has a positive or negative influence in Northern Ireland?"; "Overall, do you think sport has a dividing or uniting role in Northern Ireland?" The vast majority of interviewees said that sport was positive, but were more ambivalent regarding the question of whether on balance, sport was unifying or divisive. Both questions opened up a number of themes concerning the impact of sport for individuals and communities, and its capacity to act as a bridge and barrier between individuals, and between communities.

### 3.11.1 Positive aspects of sport

We may group the positive impacts of sport that were identified by interviewees into three themes: *benefits to the individual; the peacebuilding and relationship-building capacity of sport; and benefits to the community.*

#### *Benefits to the individual*

There was strong awareness of the physical and mental health benefits that accrue from sport. As we saw in our section dealing with sport and older people, many people were cognisant of how sports participation from a young age can create health and fitness habits that last throughout life. A 52 year-old man believed sport was more effective at this than fitness training: "I hate going to the gym because I get bored with it, but if you can find a sport you enjoy and use it to keep you fit, it's a lot better than going on these fitness regimes because for me they don't work." A 58 year-old man

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had witnessed how sport had inculcated in his sons a concern for their own health and fitness:

“They've always got that sort of fitness thing in them, I would say, and I think that's a huge benefit, simply because it keeps them away from all the dangers that are out there, the drugs, the drink. They can enjoy themselves and have a beer, but none of the falling about sort of stuff because they're conscious of their own fitness.”

A 39 year-old man noted that “sport helps you to think clearer”. Others mentioned how sport encourages various personal qualities such as discipline, respect for self and others, and determination. A 60 year-old woman who was a retired teacher said: “I’ve taught kids who’ve been involved in boxing and that seems to cross all sorts of divides as well. It’s also been really good for the children themselves because it’s given them great self-esteem.” A 52 year-old soccer coach said that his work was about giving people skills that they can enjoy and then pass on to others when they are older: “Hopefully it'll just carry on through and make them better people, because it's not just about playing football. It's about life skills as well.” A 41 year-old respondent who was a school swimming coach reflected on the transferable lessons that playing sport teach:

“Unless you’re absolutely the zenith of your sport, everybody gets a feel of what it’s like to be good and everybody gets a feels of what it’s like to be no good. Everybody knows what it’s like to lose and everybody knows what it’s like to win. I would get up at, you know, half five, five days a week to swim; and I still swim about 20 kilometres a week but in many ways it is a bloody waste of time. You’re never going to get to the Olympics or make one penny out of it. But what it does give you is grit and determination and spin-offs which spin off into other areas. Whenever you’re not coping or not doing well, you get on with it (...) That can transfer over into work as well, can’t it? Or going to a university that you don’t like, you get on with it and get your head down and get through.”

Inherent in this interviewee’s response is the flipside of the argument – which we look at below – that sport is potentially damaging to people by categorising them as ‘winners’ or ‘losers’. The interviewee points out that sport can give people a healthier view of victory and defeat, keeping them both in perspective, and encouraging dedication notwithstanding.

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### *The peacebuilding and relationship-building capacity of sport*

Interviewees strongly endorsed the idea that sport is an excellent vehicle for building relationships between diverse people. There were three aspects to this. Firstly, a number of interviewees noted that cross-community support for elite sports had the potential to bring people together from across the sectarian divide. For example, some mentioned rugby: “I know a lot of people that would watch the rugby,” said a 72 year-old Protestant man, “and when Ireland's playing, they always support Ireland no matter what side they're from. So I think it really can sort of bring everyone together.” A 52 year-old Catholic man mentioned the unifying nature of international tournaments:

“I mean things like when you have a major event like the World Cup, people tend to go to bars – there's a negative side to that – but there's an atmosphere that's created with the flags up etc. And I think that's all quite good and positive.... I think at the local level, football would be quite divisive, but at a World Cup, people tend to bond together. We're all wearing the same cap.”

Other unifying figures mentioned were Northern Ireland's world class golfers and Olympic athletes, Barry McGuigan, as well as the successful Northern Ireland soccer team of the 1980s. As a 19 year-old Protestant woman noted: “It gives a good name to the country when people perform well.”

Secondly, interviewees recognised that sport brought together people from different walks of life who would not normally meet. A 52 year-old Protestant man commented:

“[Sport] makes the communities mix more. You know, I work with guys whose sons and grandsons play for junior football teams and they're always mixing with the other side of the community playing soccer and having mini tournaments between maybe two from West Belfast, two from East Belfast, you know, and it seems to work pretty well.”

We noted in our section examining the sectarian divide and sport and that many interviewees had played sport in clubs with mixed community membership.

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Thirdly, several interviewees highlighted that sport transcends difference: all that matters is the ability to play the game. A 38 year-old Protestant man highlighted how sport can be a universal ‘language’:

“We went to Kenya once with a team, a missionary team, and just in the middle of nowhere I had a football out and then all these kids appeared, so it was just totally cross country, cross culture really and suddenly, we couldn’t really speak to each other but we had banter about playing.”

A 21 year-old Catholic man who was heavily involved in a dance club remarked how team activities foster – out of necessity – trust between participants:

“I know definitely with dancing and gymnastics, background or sexual orientation or anything like that just doesn't come into play at the end of the day. Especially with dancing. If you're doing certain dance moves and you're having to throw someone over your shoulder or something, they're putting their trust in you no matter where you're from or what church you go to or whatever else – who you're going out with. I think it definitely brings people together.”

Similarly, another man, a 32 year-old Protestant highlighted the sense of interdependence fostered on a soccer team, and how the absence of barriers on the pitch can shape how people see others off the pitch too:

“I think sport anywhere has a positive role 'cause well if you're on a football pitch and you're in a team and the team is integrated you're going to look out for the people that are on your team. So it can break down barriers between religious sides or it can break down barriers of the religious divide while they're on the pitch and then hopefully that then carries on in life.”

### *Benefits to the community*

A few people noted that sport may help prevent anti-social behaviour. As a 19 year-old Protestant woman put it: “When you're involved in sport you're off the street and you've got something else to focus on rather than hanging about. So in different areas it would help obviously with crime. If

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people were more involved in it then it would lower that in the area.” A 57 year-old Catholic grandmother said:

“Because there's an awful lot of parents now who don't want their children on the street because there's that much drugs and that much drinking. No matter if you've no money, the kids will find money for something. So what people are trying to do now is draw them into the community centres so they get a bit of fun out of what they're doing. They're enjoying themselves and it's a couple of hours that they could have spent on the street ripping cars apart or hijacking or drinking or drugs and causing a nuisance of themselves.”

The GAA's crucial role as a focus for community life, especially in rural areas, was highlighted by this 41 year-old Catholic man:

“In rural areas, we've got Gaelic clubs. They've got a community hall, they've got a presence in the local area and they give the children something to do. You ask the question what would the kids do if they didn't have that. They'd be left to their own devices; they could get involved possibly in some anti-community activities who knows. But it gives them, it's a sort of, Gaelic has been known as, well Gaelic clubs have been described someone described them at one time as the glue that held the community together, particularly rural communities; because it gives people I suppose something to work towards and a lot of people in the area would play some role in a local club. Whether it be, obviously the players, other people getting involved at committee level or organising things.”

### 3.11.2 Negative aspects of sport

Despite the benefits, interviewees also raised three main negative themes in relation to sport. These related to *sport and inter-communal division*, *exclusion from sport through not being good enough*, and *excessive attention being given to sport*.

#### *Sport and inter-communal division*

Our section on sport and the inter-communal divide in Northern Ireland has already outlined the

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extent to which people recognise that sports segregation and social segregation continue to be mutually reinforcing. As a 45 year-old Protestant woman outlined, sport, along with schools and churches, is part of the sectarian ‘system’ which keeps people within their own communities:

“But I think if you look at the overall context of sport in Northern Ireland, it is still seen as part of the – your community does this and my community does that. I think sport is one of the biggest reinforcers of sectarianism. I mean if we’d had the stadium at the Maze that was going to be rugby and GAA and the rest, that might have started breaking those things down, but I think sport is still inextricably bound up with the political situation (...) [Sport] would unite the communities within their communities.”

As we have already explored in our section dealing with sectarianism and sport, soccer was singled out as being the most divisive sport, having the closest correlation between team support and political/community background: “As soon as you see what kind of football top they’re wearing whether it’s Celtic or Rangers automatically there’s a divide there,” said a 21 year-old Catholic man. A couple of interviewees noted the segregation between fans in the stands at football match as being both symbolic of, and a contributor to, the hostile attitudes that can be associated with soccer. A 39 year-old Protestant man drew the contrast between soccer and rugby:

“You can stand in a rugby terrace beside a fan of the opposing team it doesn’t make any difference. At a football match you’re at the other end of the pitch, separated by barbed wire and fences. So all that does is highlight the difference and brings back that us and them mentality. So football still has a long way to go I think.”

The nature of the international organisation of soccer, with a team each for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, can be a point of contention. This was noted by a 71 year-old Catholic man, who wished to see a single team, for pragmatic reasons as much as political:

“If they’re from Northern Ireland and they decide to play for the Republic, that’s still frowned on. I don’t say it’s either and/or. To me, they’re two teams which should, in my books, should be one. You know, we’re never going to win any World Cups for God’s sake.”

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### *Exclusion from sport: not being good enough*

Although all interviewees appreciated the benefits of sport to individuals, many also recognised that it could have more unpleasant impacts upon people, and some had personal experience of this. Several interviewees recalled the alienating experience of not being good enough to make the particular team which the school regarded as the most important. One 71 year-old Protestant man recalled:

“When I was at school, there was an after-school netball club and it started off, you know, everyone come, everyone take part, and then they chose their netball team and told everyone else not to come back. So that wasn't the nicest thing, I guess, but that was more of just a selective – it ended up being the best people and it turned into team practice and anyone else who just wanted a bit of exercise or whatever just got told to go.”

A 30 year-old Protestant woman said:

“I suppose, I kind of always felt like, unless you were one of those super talented sort of people who was really into hockey, they really didn't bother with you much. So I suppose I never really had that sort of background, where family members played sport together or any kind of thing like that. So I suppose I came into school not really having had that experience and didn't really feel like, unless I played hockey, there was anything else there for me.”

A 58 year-old Protestant man pointed out that the competitive side of sport is a “double edged sword because those that are good will perform really well and will enjoy every second of it and every minute of it. Those that are not particularly good at sport (...) may even feel inadequate in some way.” In these accounts there are two issues. Firstly, the exclusion inherent in sport – the division between winners and losers – and the feelings of superiority/inferiority that can engender; secondly, the fixation of schools on certain team sports, and the lack of options for those who are not suited to the school's flagship sports.

Two women noted that the hierarchy created by sport can lend itself to bullying:

“That traditional set up in school where the fat kids were always the ones on the edge, you

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weren't really encouraged and the sports teachers were always a certain type of hard core kind of... [At my school] the sports were a way of the bullies basically just exerting more pressure, so you weren't going to try and take the ball over someone towering over you with a threatening attitude" (female, 45, Protestant).

"If you're at school and you're not very sporty inclined, which I mean I wouldn't have been sporty inclined; you can be poked fun at. So I suppose you can be bullied in a way and that can put you off maybe later on pursuing sport" (female, 63, Protestant).

A 21 year-old Catholic man said that at school football, five or six boys had kept the ball between themselves, so "because of that I just didn't even bother taking an interest."

### *Excessive attention given to sport*

One interviewee, a 69 year-old Protestant man believed that, while sport had its obvious benefits, people could become almost obsessed by it:

"I have absolutely nothing against sport, like everything else kept in perspective and kept in proportion. There are other things other than sport that young people maybe could be doing and if they were doing something maybe more practical and helpful and getting benefits because they're never going to do that, sport, sport, sport. I was always taught to use my hands and go and do something, get a trade, do something. You can always fall back on it. They don't seem to have hobbies or other interests or other things that can use their time."

This respondent was an evangelical Christian and was critical of the large amount of sport played on Sundays, believing that it was symptomatic of a wider culture of non-stop entertainment and selfishness. The view that sport can become all-consuming in people's lives was not widely voiced within our sample. However, a 74 year-old man did decry the commodification of elite sport, and the obsession it can inspire:

"I'm not interested in soccer. People are fanatics. I just never did that... I don't support any of them, they're overpaid, every one of them. Rooney gets a million every five weeks. I resent that. I've a relative goes and the cheapest seat you could get was forty pounds. That's what pays all these guys."



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Also, a few interviewees displayed a level of devotion to sport that may be considered as less than healthy: one man, a 41 year-old said that without sport his “life would not be worth living” while another, a 42 year-old former Catholic GAA player, said it was his “*raison d’etre*”.

### 3.11.3 Summary

Although respondents recognised that sport could, under certain circumstances, have a negative impact on communal harmony, and individual self-esteem, there was overwhelming support for the view that sport is a positive force. Sport was seen as giving people healthy habits, teaching perseverance and a realistic attitude to winning and losing, and providing participants with a friendship circle. It can bring together people who would not otherwise meet, in a common interest and purpose. Thus, sport acts at a number of levels – the psychological, the physical, the interpersonal, and the intergroup – to contribute to people’s overall wellbeing. Interviewees did offer examples of how sport can encourage feelings of superiority, dominance and obsession, although this may have occurred in contexts which were not managed, or managed well, by competent instructors. In sum, interviewees were positively disposed towards sport as vehicle for personal and community development.

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## 3.12 Conclusion

This section has presented detailed and wide-ranging findings on the perceptions and experiences of a representative sample of people in NI regarding social inclusion/exclusion and sport. Thus far, we have focussed on illustrating and explaining the themes that emerged from the interviews in relation to each of the topics covered. The purpose of this concluding section is to bridge the gap between the Literature Review and the quantitative research by both considering the key themes from the qualitative interviews in the light of the literature and highlighting the most pertinent questions taken forward in the quantitative phase of the SESNI research project.

Interviewees were in no doubt that **religious community background** continues to exercise a strong influence on what sports people play. Respondents did not explain this with reference to history, or the purported tri-partite division of sport – British, Irish, and international – that has been articulated in some of the academic literature. Instead, they attributed the religious community division in sport to a more immediate cause: the school system. Indeed, the determining influence of schools in sport was indicated by the fact that, according to an NVivo word count, ‘school’ was one of the most frequently recurring words in the interviews. The strength of perception among the general public of the link between the divided school system and segregation in sports is therefore a topic which is explored in the NILT survey.

Also mentioned were sport’s role as a politico-religious marker and the impact of on-going territorial segregation on sport. These interlinked problems emerged from the Literature Review, and the interviewees provided rich detail and telling anecdotes to illustrate their on-going salience. The ‘otherness’ of certain sports venues, the manner in which sports emblems or even equipment could identify someone as a member of the out-group, and the related threat/anxiety that this may

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cause in particular areas, were all mentioned by participants. Interviewees also offered a wide range of opinions on the role of symbols and anthems in sport, with the majority viewing them as divisive. Nevertheless, some respondents had crossed the sectarian divide in sport – for example, a Protestant who had attended Croke Park with friends, or Catholics who had attended Windsor Park, passionate Catholic rugby fans, or the man who ensured his son played soccer, rugby and Gaelic. These interviewees tended to be younger, suggesting that they were enjoying, and were indicative of, a post-Troubles thaw in the exclusivity of the three main sports. Thus, public perceptions of the roles of symbols and anthems, and territory in sport (particularly how inclusive are the sports grounds belonging to soccer, rugby and Gaelic) are questions that are probed in the quantitative phase of the project.

Unsurprisingly, given its central role in shaping awareness and perceptions of sport, media coverage was a recurring theme in the interviews. However, what was less predictable was the fact that, with regard to sectarianism and sport, what people watched on television did not always fit neatly with their community background and which sports they might be expected to support. A small number of Protestants, including some who were very critical of the perceived sectarian nature of the GAA as an organisation, watched Gaelic games on television. The increased television coverage of Ulster rugby matches had found an audience among Catholic respondents, while some Catholic interviewees, who again were critical of its perceived sectarian ‘baggage’, maintained an interest in Northern Ireland international soccer through viewing matches on television. Thus, while community custom and territorial division may currently prevent people from one or other community background from playing or attending as spectators at fixtures of certain sports, television allows people to witness and even enjoy those sports from a distance. What sports Protestants and Catholics watch on television therefore offers an interesting indicator of how open people are to sports as simply sports, rather than activities with particular cultural or political associations, and reveals the extent of latent support/good will that exists for certain sports that

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could be built upon through outreach or cultural change in the sports. This is further measured in the NILT survey.

A theme of change in NI sport recurred throughout the interviews. This was natural, given the dramatic political changes in NI, wider cultural changes (the globalisation and commodification of sport, greater inclusivity of minority groups in society) and, as we reviewed in detail in Section 2.4, the considerable efforts by sports in NI to become more inclusive. Discussing the largest spectator sports in NI and their governing bodies – soccer, Gaelic and rugby – respondents had varied views on how successful these bodies had been at opening up their sports to non-traditional constituencies, or even if they had made any efforts at all. Awareness of inclusion initiatives, by sports themselves or other sports organisers, was patchy. Moreover, interviewees had differing views on whether sport was on balance unifying or divisive in NI, and on the likelihood that sports would become more mixed in NI over time, although a majority were optimistic that sports would continue on a trajectory towards inclusion and openness. In sum, there are significant issues here regarding the public's perception of the efforts made by sports towards inclusivity, expectations of how diverse sports will be in NI in the future, and the general potential of sport to bring people together, all of which are examined in the NILT survey.

In relation to **women** and sport, some respondents did not believe that females faced exclusion, while others thought that female interest in certain sports and not others, and lower levels of interest in sport generally, were simply intrinsic to femininity. However, most recognised that gender roles and stereotypes placed obstacles in the way of women's participation, confirming the barriers discussed in Section 2.3.3. These included the fact that women are often the primary carers of children, which can mean that sports and exercise activities are discontinued after starting a family; two young mothers gave vivid testimony of this challenge. Some interviewees remarked on the second-class status of women's sport, and noted that schools may play a role in instituting such a

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hierarchy, with boys receiving greater encouragement to take part in sport, and boys' sports and teams prioritised and more highly valued and celebrated. It was felt that this second-class status was maintained even at the elite level. The nature of media coverage of female sport – including a lack of it, the dearth of female role models in most sports, the sexist portrayal of sportswomen in the media, and self-consciousness about appearance were highlighted by respondents as disincentives to women's participation. These issues were raised most frequently by young female interviewees and some who were involved in coaching female sport. (Body image is of course a problem experienced by males also, although it was not raised in our sample as a serious barrier to men's participation in sport.)

One issue which arose clearly in a number of interviews was a general sense, experienced by some women, of discomfort in male dominated facilities; those mentioned were saunas/steam rooms, swimming areas, and gyms. In these locations, males' 'performance' of their masculinity, either through grunting excessively as they lift weights or talking derogatively about women, can compound women's unease at being in swimwear and/or outnumbered by men. In sum, women emerge as a group facing many and complex barriers to sports participation, barriers which are felt keenly by some people, but are scarcely recognised by others. Thus, the extent of the perceptions revealed here is probed among the wider public in the NILT survey.

Our findings on **older people** in sport were, in the main, optimistic, with a majority of respondents, old and young, believing that sports opportunities existed for those older people who wished to avail of them. However, we noted the possibility that people may have been generalising from their knowledge of certain older people who were known to the interviewees as being highly active. Themes raised in the literature as reviewed in Section 2.3.5 did not emerge strongly in the interviews. The literature highlighted that a lack of confidence, based on societal expectations around ageing, could be a barrier to the participation of older people. Only three interviewees raised

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this as a potential obstacle. The literature has also identified the practical barriers faced by older people, such as cost and transport; again, a surprisingly small number of respondents raised these issues. Perhaps respondents did not mention these barriers as they are not unique to older people. Overall, the idea that older people were significantly excluded from sport was not one that found widespread support in the sample. One of the strongest themes from this strand of the research was the view that older people who have been active in sport throughout their lives tend to maintain this as far as possible in old age. Thus the challenge of increasing the participation in sport of older people is, ultimately, the challenge of engaging people with sport an early age.

Respondents did recognise **people with disabilities** as likely to face very significant barriers to sports participation, although, specific knowledge of how well people with disabilities are provided for was rare. The literature as reviewed in Section 2.3.6 noted a number of challenges: the (un)availability of accessible facilities, specialist equipment and trained staff, as well as difficulties experienced by people with disabilities themselves such as poor confidence, self-consciousness, cost and lack of transport. These were noted by the interviewees, although the emphasis was on the lack of suitable facilities and specially trained staff, rather than confidence and cost obstacles. The cohort of interviewees who themselves had disabilities was perhaps too small to draw definitive conclusions, but the fact that people with disabilities face significant problems with inclusion in society generally, not only sport, was evident. Perceptions of the extent of sports provision for people with disabilities is therefore explored in the NILT survey.

An overwhelming majority of interviewees agreed that **socio-economic status** influences what sports people can play. This was not merely in relation to cost – of lessons, equipment, fees etc. – but in relation to the types of sports that people are likely to come into contact with and develop an interest in. Moreover, some sports were clearly recognised as being the preserve of a particular social class. Nevertheless, a substantial proportion was aware of affordable sporting opportunities.

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The literature as reviewed in Section 2.3.4 made clear that it is their disproportionate poverty which is at the heart of the marginalisation of socially excluded groups, and the barrier of cost has been noted in other sections of this Report. Thus, we examine the extent to which cost is perceived as a barrier in the NILT survey.

In line with research, as reviewed in Section 2.3.7, **LGB people** emerge from our qualitative research as facing significant exclusion from sport. In respect to the general public, a similar number of interviewees had little knowledge of this topic or believed LGB people did not face exclusion, as believed that LGB people did face exclusion. However, testimony from LGB interviewees was less ambiguous and confirmed what is known from the literature: homophobia is common within sport, and certain team sports perpetuate ideas about gender that are hostile to gay people and which make sports environments very difficult places for them. A few interviewees recognised that NI may be particularly unwelcoming for LGB people, and indeed the negative views of some heterosexual respondents exemplified the challenges facing LGB people. Some heterosexual interviewees' observations that people may feel uncomfortable with an LGB person in the changing room/showers were consistent with LGB interviewees' reports of how intimidating changing rooms could be for them. Perhaps most interesting was the fact that, aside from whether or not people perceived exclusion, hardly any of the general public had had contact with an LGB person in the course of their sporting experience. This suggests self-exclusion (or an unwillingness to 'come out') on the part of LGB people based on the expectation that they would not be welcome in sports contexts, and echoes the findings of research reported in the literature, that LGB issues with regard to sport may remain hidden. Probing the key issues raised in the interviews – homophobia and changing rooms – in the NILT survey will contribute to bringing light to this area, at least in the NI context.

Interviews with **transgender people** highlighted the same issues – transphobia and difficulties with

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changing rooms – although the visibility of transgender people’s physical difference makes their exclusion even greater. Being in a sporting or leisure environment with children who were born before they had transitioned also posed particular difficulties (e.g. a child calling a female ‘daddy’). The challenges and threat that attend even going out in public dramatically reduce transgender people’s sport and exercise options. Again, attitudes to transgender people in sporting contexts emerged as a significant topic for inclusion in the NILT survey.

Questions on sports inclusion/exclusion experienced by **ethnic minorities** elicited similar responses as those in relation to LGB people. Firstly, most members of the general public had little awareness of the issue, struggling to answer at all. Secondly, some respondents noted the possibility that ethnic minorities would face barriers that were perceived rather than real but nothing about sport itself actually meant that they could not participate. The third similarity was the fact that some people did accept that ethnic minorities would face prejudice (less than believed LGB people would) and a few interviewees actually showed this prejudice. Several of the ethnic minority respondents cited positive experiences of sport, but had suffered racism, both in sporting contexts and elsewhere. Overall, opinions and experiences with regard to ethnic minorities and sport were wide-ranging, and so public perceptions of how welcoming sport in NI is to ethnic minorities is probed in the NILT survey.

Views on **communication by sports bodies** were also obtained. The most striking theme was a lack of knowledge of sporting opportunities at the local level, suggesting that sports communication beyond the world of popular, elite and commercialised sport is either not prioritised or not well targeted. Having said this, a number of respondents praised the work of local Councils and leisure centres in promoting local sports opportunities. A related issue was the specific problem facing ethnic minorities, who lacked knowledge of what sports were available in their area. Therefore, a question investigating the extent of knowledge of sports available in people’s locality is included in



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the NILT questionnaire. Another issue here was the extent to which interviewees were familiar with or had participated in cross-community sporting initiatives. While a few had no awareness or experience of such initiatives, most respondents identified at least one, the most common being Football for All. However, specific knowledge of these programmes was lacking in detail, and obtained from the media or second-hand sources. The issue of knowledge of and attitude to cross-community sporting initiatives is therefore an important one for inclusion in the NILT survey.

Finally, questions were posed to ascertain whether overall sport was perceived to be **positive or negative in NI**. The Literature Review had explored how sport has been viewed by policy makers as a potential cure for various social ills, including anti-social behaviour and educational underachievement, and as a vehicle for peacebuilding. Interviewees identified some negative aspects of sport in NI including the role of sport in creating sectarian division, and fostering feelings in individuals of being excluded from particular sports through not being skilled enough to be selected for competitive teams. Overall, however, respondents were generally very positively disposed towards sport, being aware of its personal health and well-being benefits for individuals and the community and societal advantages associated with sport's ability to bring people together in a common purpose. The prevalence of these attitudes to sport's contribution to social inclusion/exclusion is an important matter to explore in the NILT survey.

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## 4 Quantitative findings

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## 4.1 Methodology

To develop the questionnaire used in this part of the project the researchers, guided by the main emergent themes from the qualitative research, individually drafted lists of statements in relation to sport which could serve as survey items. This generated over one hundred items. The research team then met several times to shorten the list, remove overlap, and refine, broaden or remove items as necessary. The goal was to generate the most penetrating and pertinent questions given the limit of 50-60 items imposed by the NILT module framework. Once this was achieved the researchers met with representatives of NILT and the SESNI Steering Group to agree the final set of items for the NILT survey.

The survey was piloted in September 2013 and the full field work, with an achieved sample of 1210 respondents, carried out between October and December 2013. Technical Notes for the survey, including procedures and sample information, are provided in Appendix 3. Full NILT survey results are available at <http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2013/>. For the purposes of statistical analysis, 'don't know' responses were excluded and so percentage figures in this section differ slightly from those on the NILT website. This part of the Report is divided into eight sections. It presents the findings from the survey, following the structure of the SESNI module as given to respondents, paying particular attention to the impact of religion, gender, socio-economic background and age on sports exclusion where relevant. In most instances, the relative impact of these variables was tested using two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and if this showed significance, a Scheffé's post hoc test was used to identify the direction of significance. Logistic regression was also employed in relation to some findings. The results are summarised at the end of each section and in a final concluding section.

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## 4.2 Sport and schools

### 4.2.1 Results and analysis

The first suite of questions in the survey explored respondents' attitudes towards sport and schools. The survey question read: 'Thinking about sport in schools. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?' Percentages and overall mean rating scores for each item are presented in Table 1. The impact of age and gender was investigated.

Table 1 Respondents' Experiences of Sport in School

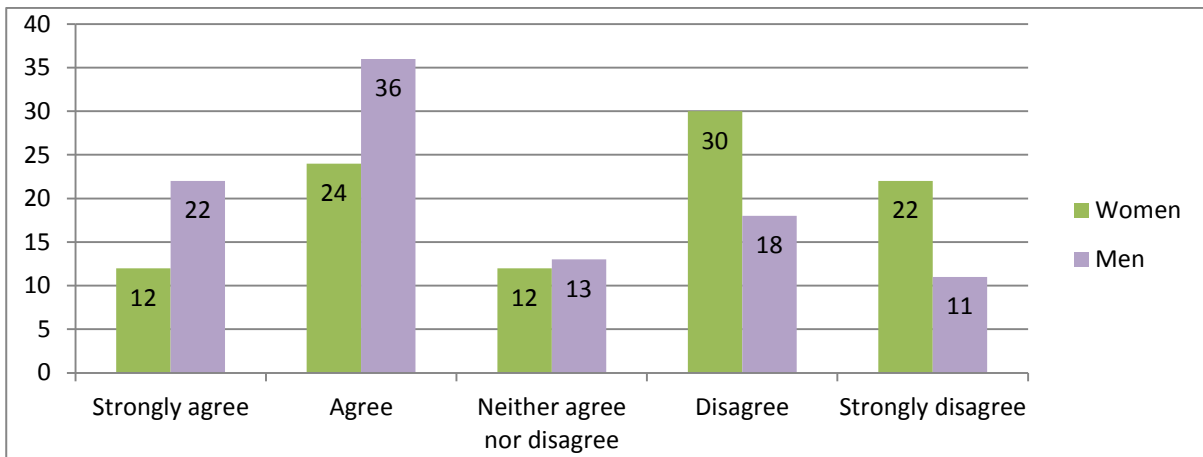
	Strongly agree (%) <sup>4</sup>	Agree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)	Mean rating score
My experience of sport at school has given me a lifelong love of sport	17	30	12	25	17	2.95
My experience of sport at school put me off sport for good	8	12	18	37	26	3.61
At my secondary school there was a range of sports on offer that suited different abilities and interests	12	45	15	22	6	2.65
Boys' sports teams are generally seen as more important by schools than girls' teams when it comes to sport	14	45	19	20	3	2.53
Schools often become obsessed with one team sport and forget about all the others	14	49	20	16	2	2.44
Segregated schools are a major cause of segregation in sports	10	41	28	19	2	2.61

(Rating scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree)

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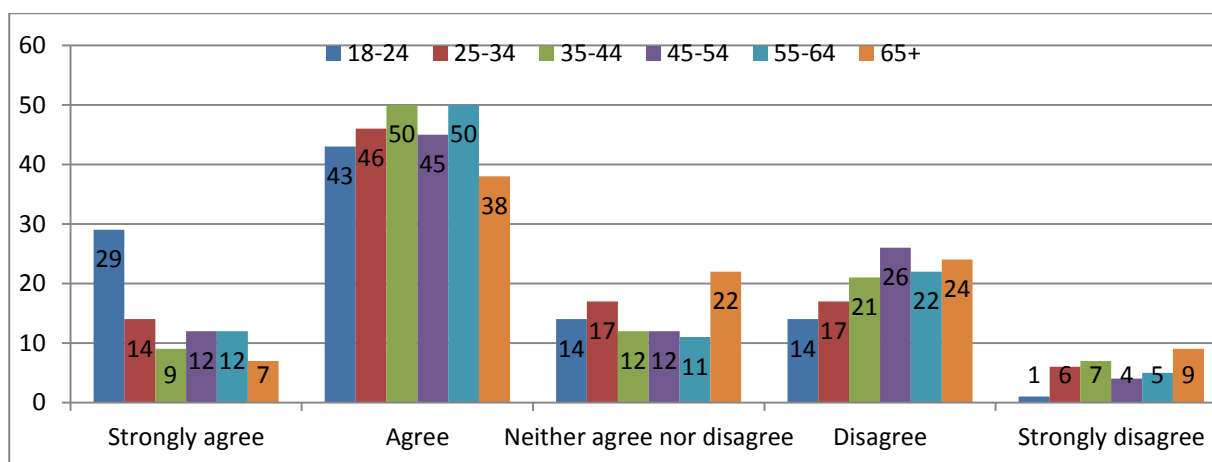
<sup>4</sup> Percentages throughout the report are rounded and so may not total 100.

For the first item, just under half of respondents (47%) agreed or strongly agreed that their experience of sport at school had given them a lifelong love of sport while 42% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Gender had a significant impact on responses ( $f(5, 1163) = 62.19, p < 0.01$ ) in that men ( $\bar{x} = 2.60$ ) were significantly more likely than women ( $\bar{x} = 3.24$ ) to agree that school sport had had such a positive effect. Percentage results for men and women are shown in Chart 1.



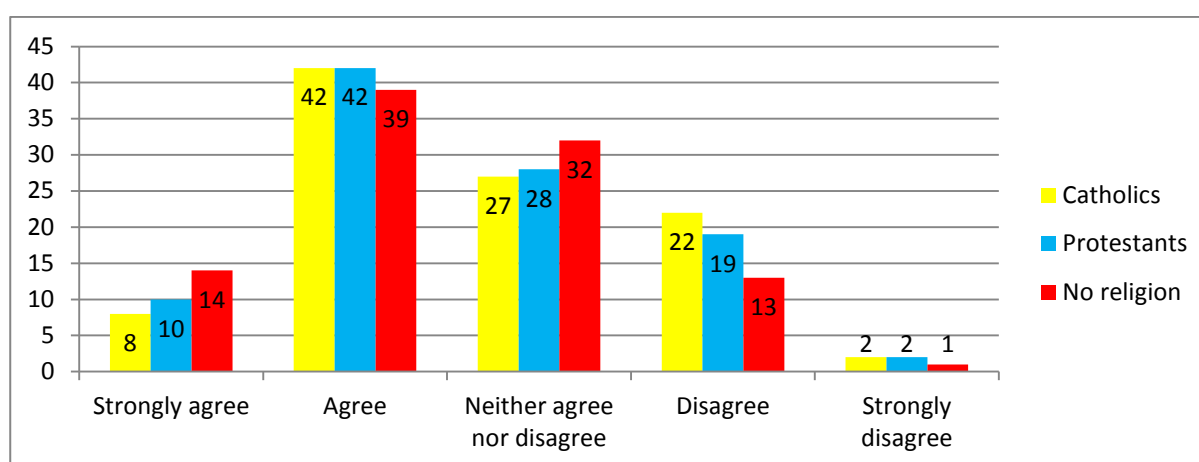
**Chart 1** My experience of sport at school has given me a lifelong love of sport – results for men and women

In keeping with this finding, gender also significantly influenced the second item which asked whether school sport put respondents off sport for good ( $f(1, 1156) = 35.24, p < 0.01$ ) with women ( $\bar{x} = 3.42$ ) being more likely to agree than men ( $\bar{x} = 3.84$ ). For the third item, which probed perceptions of the sports on offer at school, a significant age difference emerged ( $f(5, 1133) = 6.08, p < 0.01$ ), with the 18-24 age category ( $\bar{x} = 2.16$ ) having a more positive view than the 35-44 ( $\bar{x} = 2.66$ ), 45-54 ( $\bar{x} = 2.64$ ) or 65+ ( $\bar{x} = 2.90$ ) categories. Percentage results by age are shown in Chart 2.



**Chart 2 At my secondary school there was a range of sports on offer that suited different abilities and interests – results for age categories**

In relation to the fourth item, 59% agreed or strongly agreed that boys' sports are generally seen as more important than girls' sports. For the fifth item, 63% agreed or strongly agreed that schools become obsessed with one sport and forget about all the others. For the sixth item, just over half of respondents (51%) agreed or strongly agreed that segregated schools are a major cause of segregation in sports, and only 21% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Age and gender had no significant impact on answers to the fourth, fifth or sixth items. Given the salience of religion to the sixth item on segregated schools' influence on sports, the impact of religion was also investigated but no significant differences emerged. Percentage results according to religion for this item are shown in Chart 3.



**Chart 3 Segregated schools are a major cause of segregation in sport – results by religion**

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Question 2 asked if there was a sport that the respondents would like to have played at school but that was not available to them. Here, 78% of people disagreed, with 22% agreeing. Respondents who answered in the affirmative were asked to name the sport they would have liked to have played. A large number of answers was generated. Soccer, rugby, tennis, cricket and basketball respectively were mentioned most frequently.

#### 4.2.2 Summary

The topic of school sport clearly divides opinion. One in five respondents said that their experience of sport at school had actually put them off sport for good, with age having no significant impact on responses. Thus, a minority of people continue to be alienated from sport as a result of their experiences at school. Furthermore, the findings show that these people are more likely to be women.

Participants were also ambivalent about the range of sports available and focussed upon at their schools. More than half of respondents (57%) were happy about the range of sports on offer at their school, with younger people having the most positive views. This suggests an increased satisfaction with sports curricula over time. Nevertheless, just under half of the sample agreed or strongly agreed that boys' sports are generally seen as more important than girls' sports, with little difference between the views of men and women or age groups. A higher proportion, 63%, agreed or strongly agreed that schools become obsessed with one sport and devalued others, again with men and women in agreement and age making little difference. That many schools are focussed on male sports, and team sports, clearly remains a persisting and widely recognised reality.

Regarding the issue of segregation, schools and sport, just over half of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that segregated schools are a major cause of segregation in sports, with only a fifth

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disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. This finding was the same within both the Protestant and Catholic cohorts. A large minority (28%) neither agreed nor disagreed, which may mean either ambivalence about segregation or a rejection of the negative implication that separate school systems cause segregation in sports. In any case, a link between the divided school system and subsequent sectarian division within sport is widely perceived.



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## 4.3 Television viewing of sports

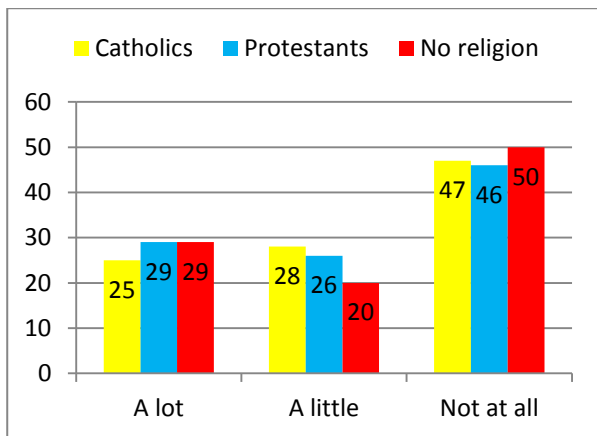
### 4.3.1 Results and analysis

Question 3 investigated levels of television viewing of some of the most popular sports, asking how often respondents had watched these sports over the past twelve months. Table 2 shows percentages and overall mean scores.

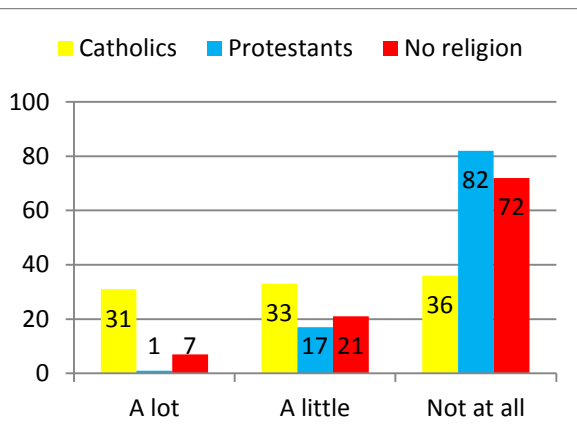
Table 2 Television Viewing of Sports

	A lot (%)	A little (%)	Not at all (%)
English or Scottish premier league soccer matches	27	25	48
Gaelic football matches	14	23	62
Northern Ireland international soccer Matches	16	27	58
Republic of Ireland international soccer Matches	12	29	60
Ireland rugby matches	28	30	43
Ulster rugby matches	23	29	48

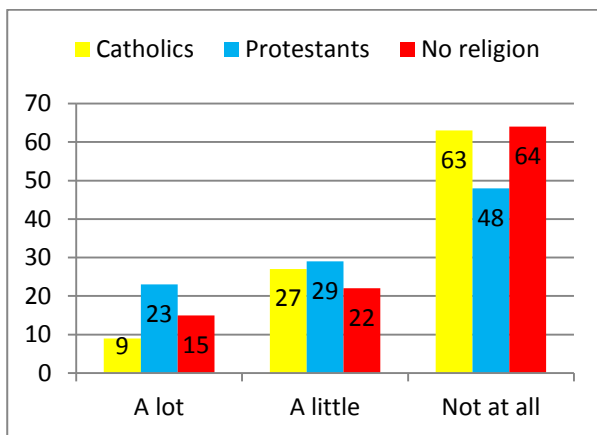
This question was designed primarily to investigate the extent to which television viewing of these sports followed the traditional religious divide in Northern Ireland (NI) sport. Percentage results by religion are depicted in Charts 4-9.



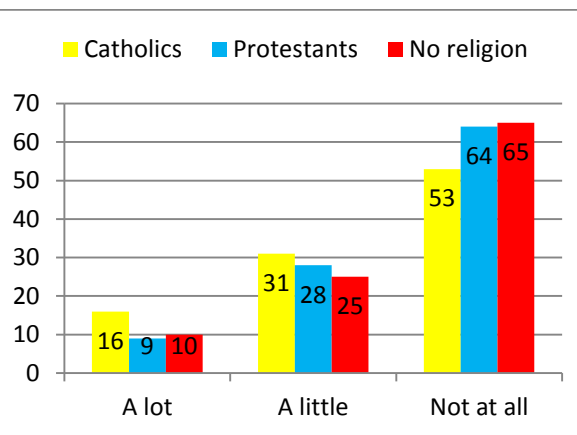
**Chart 4 English and Scottish Premier League soccer**



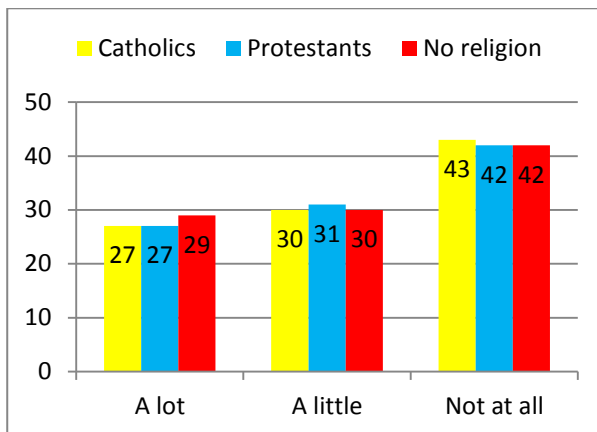
**Chart 5 Gaelic football**



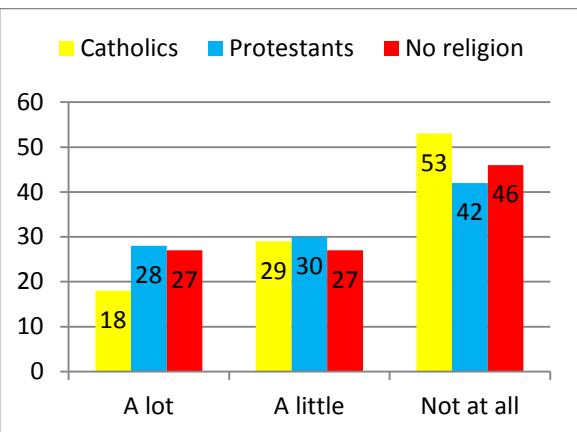
**Chart 6 Northern Ireland international soccer**



**Chart 7 Republic of Ireland international soccer**



**Chart 8 Ireland rugby**



**Chart 9 Ulster rugby**

As the percentages show, the only sports/teams that did not exhibit marked religious differences in TV viewing were English and Scottish Premier League soccer and Ireland rugby. By contrast, some 31% of Catholics had watched ‘a lot’ of Gaelic football in the last year compared to only 1% of

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Protestants, while just 9% of Catholics had watched NI international soccer matches ‘a lot’ compared to 23% of Protestants. Similarly, 16% of Catholics had watched Republic of Ireland international soccer matches ‘a lot’ in contrast to 9% of Protestants, while 18% of Catholics had watched Ulster rugby matches ‘a lot’ compared to 28% of Protestants. Figures for watching ‘a little’ are relatively evenly matched in all cases except Gaelic football, where almost twice as many Catholic (33%) as Protestants (17%) selected this option.

A follow up question asked if there were other sports that respondents had watched ‘a lot’ over the previous twelve months. Some 51.1% of respondents agreed, with 48.9% disagreeing. The three most frequently mentioned sports were tennis, golf and motor racing.

#### 4.3.2 Summary

Television viewing was identified by the researchers as a potential indicator of ‘hidden’ interest in sports. People who may not be inclined to attend a fixture of a sport which is not traditionally part of their cultural/community background may nonetheless express an interest through TV viewing. In fact, however, the findings show that TV viewing follows the religious divide in the ways one might expect. Gaelic games are watched overwhelmingly by Catholics. Ulster rugby is less exclusive, though still mainly watched by Protestants. NI international soccer and Republic of Ireland soccer are watched primarily by Protestants and Catholics respectively. Premier League soccer is watched by both Protestants and Catholics, but the only team that commands both Protestant and Catholic support is the Ireland rugby team.

All this is in keeping with what is widely known anecdotally and in the existing academic literature regarding how sports preference maps onto the community division in NI. In this way, the

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sport/team which received the most equal levels of Protestant and Catholic support, Ireland rugby, also reported the highest level of support overall; this suggests a positive impact of inclusivity on levels of support. It is also interesting to note that while the ‘a lot’ scores differed sharply in most cases, the ‘a little’ scores were more balanced. This may at least indicate that, although the core fan-bases of sports may be largely divided along religious lines, there nevertheless exists an openness to, and awareness of, sports beyond one’s cultural tradition. Finally, it should of course be acknowledged that this question deliberately sought to investigate interest in the main stadium sports which have traditionally had particular cultural/political associations in Ireland. As responses to the follow up question made clear, large numbers of people across NI follow sports such as tennis, golf and motor racing which have little association with the politics of division.

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## 4.4 Sport and the religious divide

### 4.4.1 Results and analysis

The next series of items investigated attitudes pertaining to sport and the religious divide in NI.

Percentages and overall mean rating scores are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Attitudes to Sport and the Religious Divide

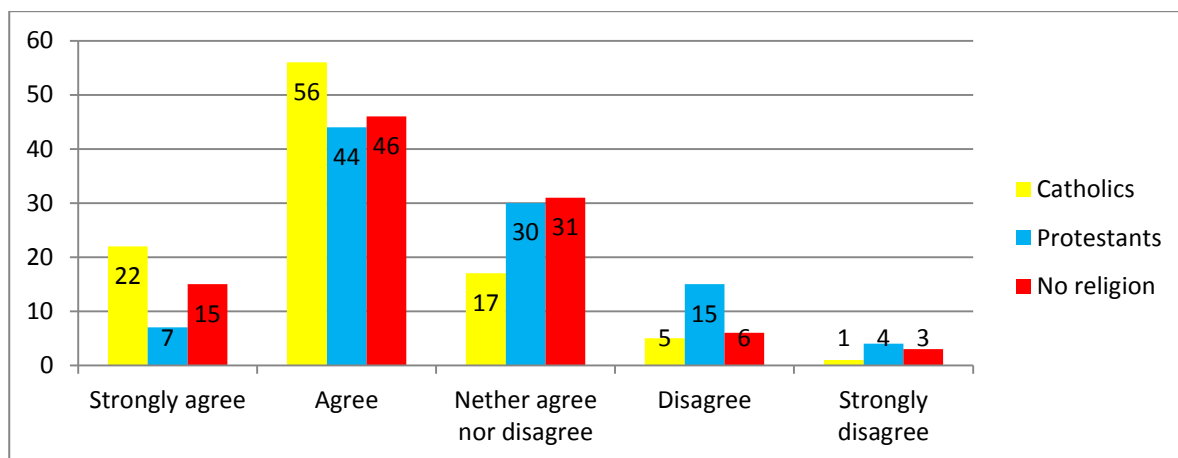
	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)		Mean rating score
There is nothing wrong with different sports or teams being for Protestants or for Catholics	11	46	17	21	5		2.62
Sport is a good way to break down barriers between Protestants and Catholics	29	57	10	4	0		1.9
I would like to see more Protestants playing Gaelic sports	15	49	25	9	2		2.39
Sectarianism puts me off some sports	9	37	22	29	4		2.82
National anthems should not be part of sport in Northern Ireland	9	27	22	31	11		3.08
I would like to see more Catholics supporting the Northern Ireland international soccer team	13	51	30	5	1		2.35

(Rating Scale: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree)

Here, the impact of age and religion was investigated. For the first item, over half of respondents (57%) believed that there is nothing wrong with different sports or teams being for Protestants or

Catholics. Only one in four disagreed or strongly disagreed. Significant difference emerged in relation to religion ( $f(2,1164) = 4.06, p = 0.02$ ). Protestants ( $\bar{x} = 2.54$ ) were significantly more likely to agree than the no religion group ( $\bar{x} = 2.83$ ) that there was nothing wrong with different sports or teams being for Protestants or Catholics ( $\bar{x} = 2.62$ ).

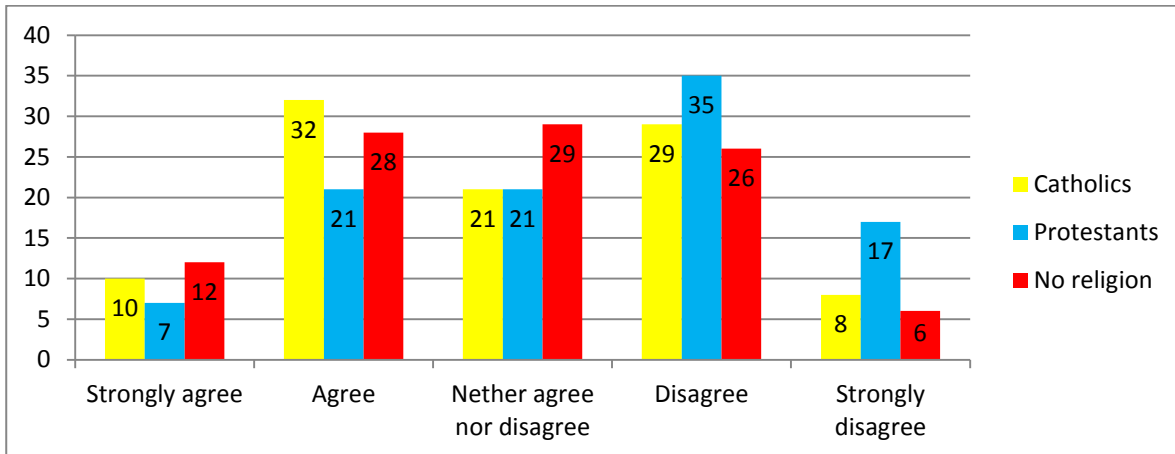
Responses to the second item revealed overwhelming support for the idea that sport is a good way to break down barriers between Protestants and Catholics, with 86% either agreeing or strongly agreeing. The third item asked respondents whether they would like to see more Protestants playing Gaelic sports; 64% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Religion was significant ( $f(2,1163) = 43.89, p < 0.01$ ), with Catholics more likely to agree ( $\bar{x} = 2.1$ ) than the no religion group ( $\bar{x} = 2.42$ ), both of whom were significantly more likely to agree than Protestants ( $\bar{x} = 2.66$ ). Percentage results by religion are shown in Chart 10.



**Chart 10 I would like to see more Protestants playing Gaelic sports – results by religion**

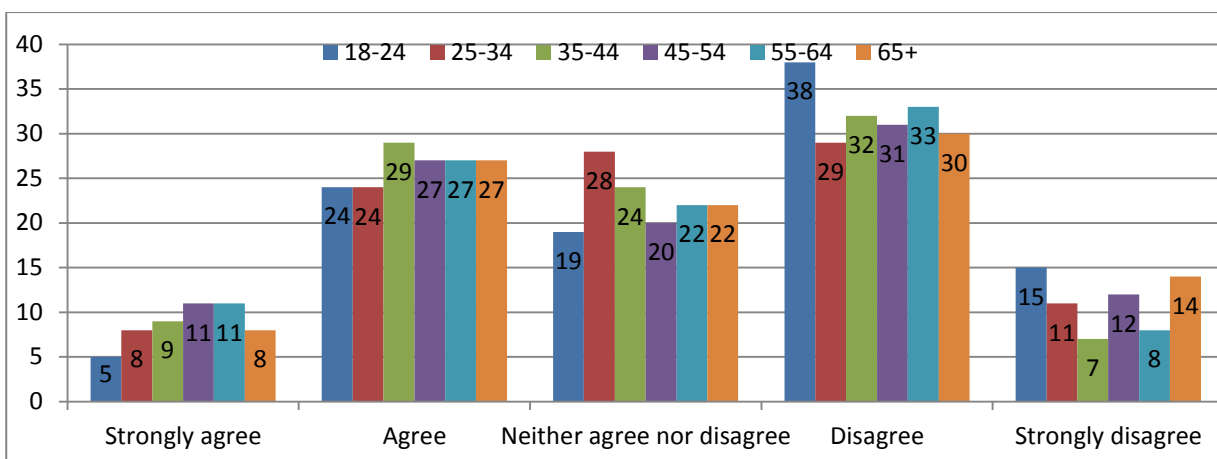
For the fourth item, 46% agreed or strongly agreed that sectarianism put them off some sports, with 33% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. The fifth item asked for respondents' level of agreement with the proposition that 'national anthems should not be part of sport in NI'. Opinion was divided, with 36% agreeing or strongly agreeing and a slightly higher number (42%) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. A significant difference was found in relation to religion ( $f(2,1163) = 13.72, p < 0.01$ ).

Protestants ( $\bar{x} = 3.32$ ) were significantly more likely than both Catholics ( $\bar{x} = 2.93$ ) and the no religion group ( $\bar{x} = 2.89$ ) to disagree that anthems should not be part of sport. Percentage results by religion are depicted in Chart 11.



**Chart 11 National anthems should not be part of sport in NI – results by religion**

Percentage results by age (Chart 12) show that, although age was not statistically significant, the youngest age category showed the highest level of disagreement that anthems should not be part of sport in NI.



**Chart 12 National anthems should not be part of sport in NI – results by age**

For the sixth item, 64% of people said they would like to see more Catholics supporting the NI international soccer team. As Chart 13 shows, opinion was similar among both Protestants and Catholics with, perhaps surprisingly, a slightly higher proportion of Catholics in agreement.

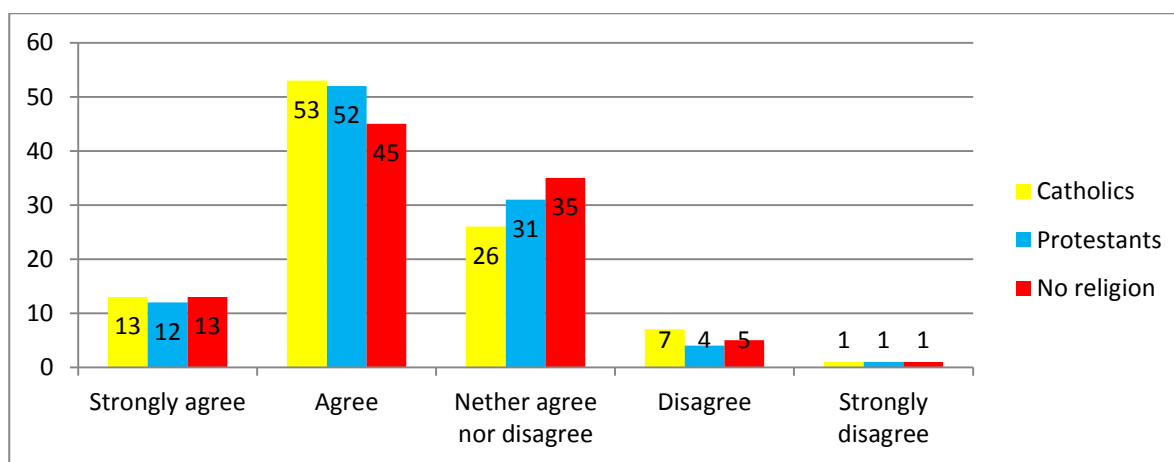


Chart 13 I would like to see more Catholics supporting the NI international soccer team – results by religion

#### 4.4.2 Summary

This section of the questionnaire spotlighted how the religious divide continues to impact upon sport and sporting attitudes in NI. The figure of 57% believing that there is nothing wrong with different sports or teams being for Protestants or Catholics is particularly high. Responses were similar among Protestants and Catholics, with the no religion group more likely to disagree with the item. Moreover, younger people did not differ significantly from older people in their attitudes. This suggests a strong level of support for the extant systems of separate sports for Protestants and Catholics, or at least a reluctance to change the current divisions that exist within sports. Nevertheless, the fact that 86% of respondents agreed that sport has the capacity to erode sectarian division in NI is worthy of note. This finding does not necessarily contradict the first finding, but suggests that although people view sport's peacebuilding capacity positively, they do not necessarily identify a pressing need to challenge the existing religious make-up of sports.

The third item revealed strong support (64%) for more Protestants playing Gaelic sports. This



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included very high support among Catholics (78%) for greater religious diversity in the GAA, but Protestants showed a lower level of support for this prospect although a majority (51%) was in favour. The lower percentage for Protestants may be due to them being alienated from the sport, or believing that the GAA will not be able to change enough to make the sport more inclusive and welcoming for Protestants. Comparing this with the sixth item, the same proportion overall wanted to see more Catholics supporting the NI international soccer team. Levels of agreement with the item were similar among Protestants (64%) and Catholics (66%) yet, interestingly, slightly higher numbers of Catholics agreed. This finding may mean that Catholics would like to see more Catholics getting behind the NI team as it is, or that they would like to see more Catholics being able to get behind the NI team in response to change in the sectarian associations of NI international soccer. Either way, it is a noteworthy finding for NI international soccer.

In response to the fourth item, 46% agreed or strongly agreed that sectarianism put them off some sports. The fact that almost half of the sample said they were alienated from some sports due to sectarianism identifies this as a significant barrier to the growth in support and participation within NI sport. Responses to the fifth item, which investigated the use of national anthems in sporting contexts, highlighted the divisive nature of such symbols in NI. Opinion was closely divided, although a slightly higher proportion of the sample disagreed that anthems should be removed. Protestants were more likely to disagree, a finding that is perhaps unsurprising given unionists' traditional attachment to British symbols, which has heightened in some sections of the Protestant community since the flag protests of 2012/13. It is also worth highlighting that there was no indication that these attitudes are changing – the youngest age category showed strongest attachment to anthems.

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## 4.5 Sporting bodies and venues

### 4.5.1 Results and analysis

Question 5 read: ‘Thinking about some of the main organisers of team sports in NI, do you think that the following organisations are taking active steps to welcome all traditions in NI?’ Percentage results and mean rating scores are shown in Table 4. Although the small proportions of ‘don’t know’ responses are excluded throughout the report, it should be noted that for this question, the rate of ‘don’t know’ responses was higher, at around one in four.

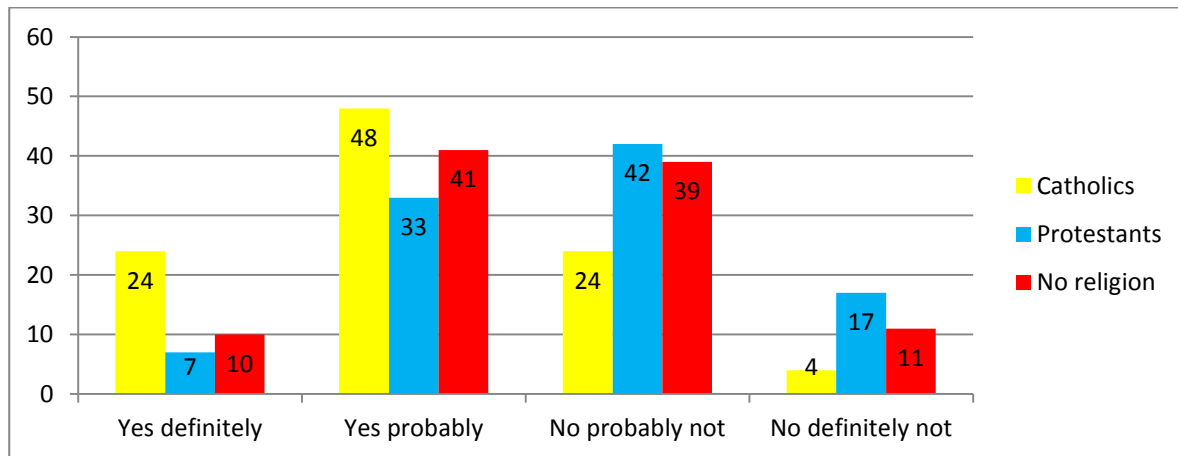
Table 4 Attitudes to Sporting Bodies

	Yes definitely (%)	Yes probably (%)	No probably not (%)	No definitely not (%)		Mean rating score
The Gaelic Athletic Association or GAA	15	41	34	11		2.4
The Irish Football Association or IFA that deals with the Northern Ireland international soccer team	15	53	28	5		2.24
Ulster Rugby	26	57	16	2		1.94
The Northern Ireland Football League that deals with local soccer teams (this used to be called the Irish League)	15	52	27	6		2.24

(Rating Scale: 1 = yes definitely, 2 = yes probably, 3 = no probably not, 4 = no definitely not)

Here, the impact of religion and age on responses was investigated. Regarding perceptions of the GAA, significant difference were found between Protestants and Catholics ( $f(2,884) = 49.8, p < 0.01$ ), with Catholics ( $\bar{x} = 2.1$ ) significantly more likely to agree than Protestants ( $\bar{x} = 2.75$ ) or the no religion group ( $\bar{x} = 2.52$ ) that the GAA was taking steps to welcome all traditions. Percentage

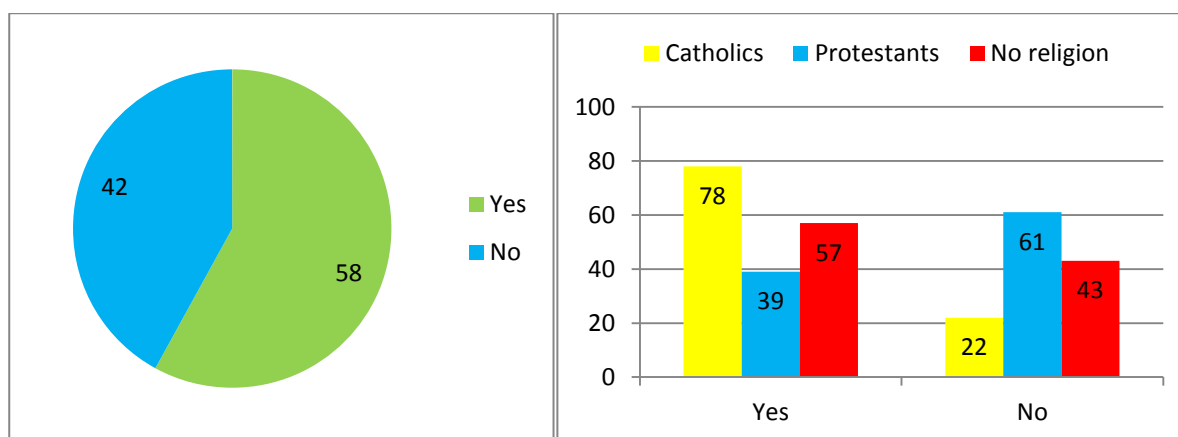
results by religion are shown in Chart 14.



**Chart 14 The GAA is taking active steps to welcome all traditions in NI – results by religion**

Religion was also significant in relation to the next item ( $f(2,862) = 4.17, p = 0.02$ ), with Catholics ( $\bar{x} = 2.15$ ) significantly more likely to agree that the IFA was taking steps to welcome all traditions compared to both Protestants ( $\bar{x} = 2.32$ ) and the no religion group ( $\bar{x} = 2.31$ ); 71% of Catholics compared to 65% of Protestants. For Ulster Rugby, religion had no impact on views but age did ( $f(5,863) = 4.17, p < 0.01$ ). The 55-64 group showed the most positive views ( $\bar{x} = 1.79$ ) and the 25-34 group the least positive ( $\bar{x} = 2.2$ ), with other age categories spread between these scores.

This theme also investigated the perceived inclusivity/accessibility of certain important sporting venues. Question 6 asked: ‘Suppose you were given tickets for a GAA match in Casement Park in Belfast. Would you try to go?’ Overall results and results by religion are shown in Charts 15 and 16. As shown in Chart 15, 58% of people responded in the affirmative.

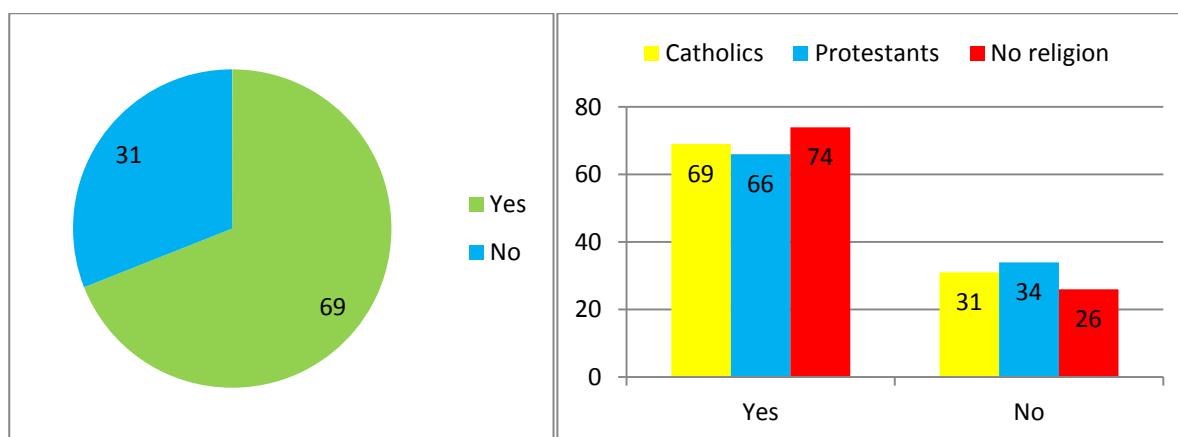


Charts 15/16 Would you go to a GAA match at Casement Park? Overall results (left), results by religion (right)

A logistic regression was performed with willingness to attend as the dependent variable. Independent variables were age and religion. The full model significantly predicted willingness to attend (omnibus chi-square = 173.37,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Both variables were significant. The values of the coefficients revealed that an increase of each age category was associated with a decrease in the odds of being willing to attend by a factor of 0.81. In relation to religion, Protestants were less likely to say they would attend than Catholics by a factor of 0.2 and the no religion group was less likely to say they would go than Catholics by a factor of 0.35.

A follow up question asked those who said they would not go to explain why. The majority of this group (79%) said they were not interested in the sport. The other main reasons given were the perception of feeling unwelcome, the location of Casement Park and a feeling of being too old. Examples of responses include: 'I wouldn't go to Casement but I'd go to Croke Park'; 'it's the location'; 'no interest in Catholic sports'; 'I don't travel to the west of the city'; 'I don't understand the game'; 'I'm too old'.

Question 7 asked: 'Suppose you were given tickets for an Ulster rugby match at the Ravenhill ground in Belfast. Would you try to go?' Overall results and results by religion are depicted in Charts 17 and 18. As shown in Chart 17, 69% said they would go.

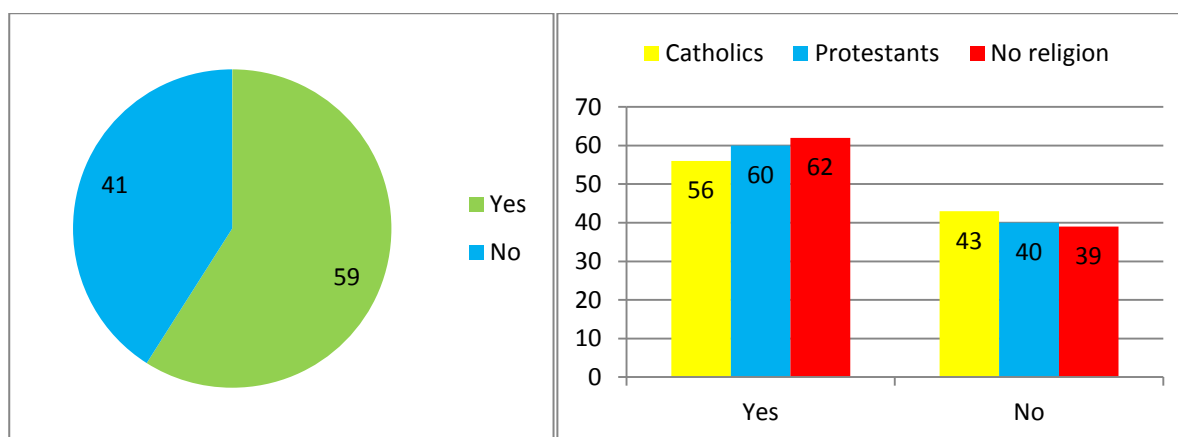


Charts 17/18 Would you go to an Ulster rugby match at Ravenhill? Overall results (left), results by religion (right)

A logistic regression was performed with willingness to attend as the dependent variable. Independent variables were age and religion. The full model significantly predicted willingness to attend (omnibus chi-square = 34.22,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Age was significant in that an increase of each age category was associated with a decrease in the odds of being willing to attend by a factor of 0.8.

A follow up question asked those who said they would not go to explain why. The majority of this group (84%) said they were not interested in the sport or mentioned age. Examples of responses include 'I'm too old' and 'I don't understand the game'.

Question 8 asked: 'Suppose you were given tickets for a NI international football match at Windsor Park in Belfast. Would you try to go?' Overall results and results by religion are depicted in Charts 19 and 20. As shown in Chart 19, 59% said they would go. There was only slight disparity between Protestant and Catholic responses.



Charts 19/20 Would you go to a NI international soccer match at Windsor Park? Overall results (left), results by religion (right)

A logistic regression was performed with willingness to attend as the dependent variable. Independent variables were age and religion. The full model significantly predicted willingness to attend (omnibus chi-square = 26.58,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Age was significant, in that an increase in each age category was associated with a decrease in the odds of being willing to attend by a factor of 0.83.

A follow up question asked those who said they would not go to explain why. The majority of this group (72%) said they were not interested in the sport. The other main reasons given were the perception of feeling unwelcome or intimidated and the feeling of being too old. Examples of responses include: 'very sectarian and horrible atmosphere'; 'the amount of unionist songs they sing would make me feel intimidated'; 'too old and bad health'.

#### 4.5.2 Summary

This part of the questionnaire sought to ascertain the extent to which the largest sporting bodies in NI are perceived as inclusive, and the extent to which their outreach and inclusivity efforts have

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been recognised by the public. Mean scores identify Ulster rugby as the most favourably viewed sporting body, with the IFA and NI Football League next and the GAA last. That said, the means also show that all the sporting bodies are viewed more positively than negatively. Interestingly, Ulster Rugby has probably taken the fewest ‘active steps’ to welcome all traditions, but scores well here because it enjoys the positive cross-community regard within which rugby is viewed.

Unsurprisingly, Catholics hold a more positive view of the GAA than Protestants, although it is significant that a large minority of Catholics (28%) believes the GAA is not doing enough to welcome all traditions. It is also striking that Catholics hold a more positive view of the IFA than Protestants. This suggests that the considerable efforts of the IFA to eradicate sectarianism from the NI international game, following high-profile incidences of sectarian trouble in the past, have been recognised within the Catholic community.

Responses to the questions regarding perceptions of the main sporting venues deviated from the pattern that would be expected in certain interesting respects. Unsurprisingly, Protestants were much less inclined to go to Casement Park than Catholics, and the reasons given included the reluctance to travel to west Belfast, the perceived Catholic nature of the sport, as well as the physical effort of attending. Ravenhill, by contrast, was acceptable to both Protestants and Catholics, yet interestingly, a slightly higher number of Catholics indicated a willingness to attend a match there than Protestants. Ravenhill attracted the highest number of people willing to attend overall, which again suggests a link between the inclusivity of a sport and overall support/success. The offer to attend Windsor Park attracted a similar proportion of both Protestants and Catholics. Given that the venue is in an area associated with the Protestant community, the relatively high proportion of Catholics willing to attend is noteworthy. Again, this suggests an improvement in how NI soccer is viewed among the Catholic community.

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## 4.6 Sport and social inclusion

### 4.6.1 Results and analysis

Question 9 investigated levels of agreement with a series of items related to sport and inclusion in NI. Percentage results and mean rating scores are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Sport and Inclusion

	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)		Mean rating score
Sporting and leisure facilities are welcoming places for older people in Northern Ireland	9	56	19	15	1		2.43
A gay or lesbian person would be welcomed to join, and play for most sports clubs in Northern Ireland	6	52	24	15	3		2.57
A person from a minority ethnic group would be welcomed to join and play for most sports clubs in Northern Ireland	6	59	20	12	3		2.44
Sports for disabled people are not taken seriously in Northern Ireland	7	42	20	28	2		2.78
For women with young families there is almost no chance of keeping up their sport or exercise	5	37	18	37	3		2.96
If there was more TV coverage of women's sport, more women would play	5	48	25	21	2		2.66
Women are second class citizens in sports in Northern Ireland	5	37	24	30	4		2.92

(Rating scale: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree)

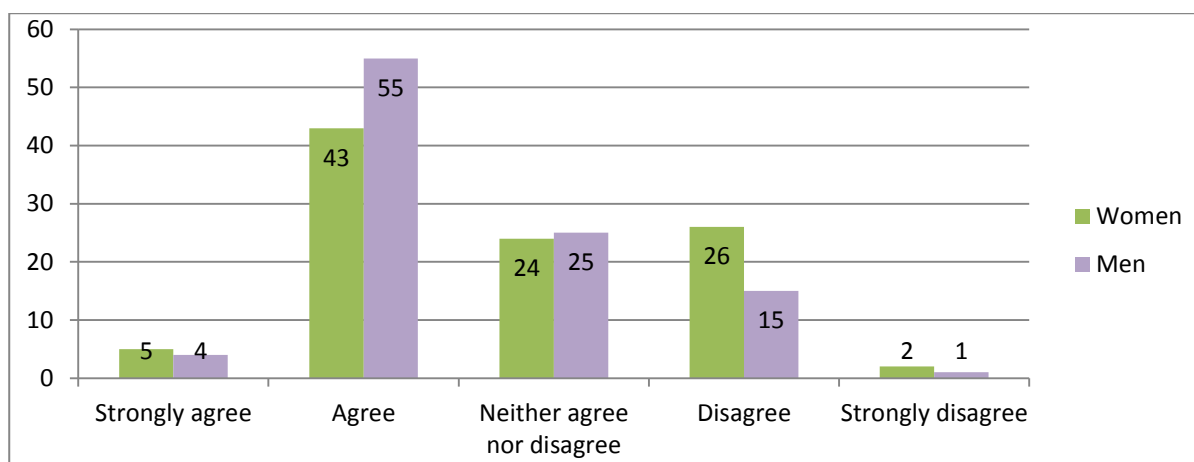
For these items, tests were carried out to investigate the impact of age and gender. Almost two-



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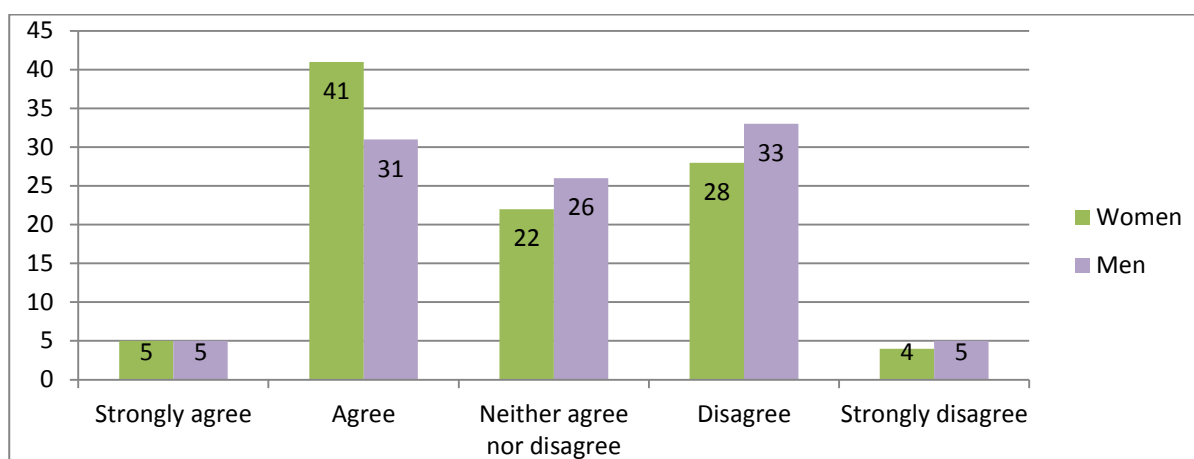
thirds of respondents (65%) agreed or strongly agreed that sports and leisure facilities are welcoming for older people, with only 16% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing . For the second item, 58% agreed or strongly agreed that a gay or lesbian person would be welcome to join and play for most sports clubs in NI. However, nearly one in four (24%) neither agreed nor disagreed. Gender had a significant impact on this item ( $f(1,942) = 14.93, p < 0.01$ ), in that women ( $\bar{x} = 2.47$ ) were more likely to agree than men ( $\bar{x} = 2.69$ ). Perceptions of ethnic minority inclusion in sport were slightly more positive, with 65% agreeing or strongly agreeing that people from ethnic minority communities would be welcomed to join and play for most sports clubs in NI.

For the fourth item, nearly half of respondents (49%) agreed or strongly agreed that sports for disabled people were not taken seriously in NI, while 30% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The fifth item divided opinion almost evenly: 42% agreed or strongly agreed that for women with young families there is little chance of being able to keep up their sport or exercise, and 40% disagreed or strongly disagreed. In relation to the sixth item which asked whether more TV coverage of women's sport would encourage more women to play sport, 53% agreed or strongly disagreed and 23% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Gender had a significant impact ( $f(1,1006) = 10.06, p < 0.01$ ), though not perhaps in the direction one would expect. As is shown by the percentage results in Chart 21, more women ( $\bar{x} = 2.77$ ) than men ( $\bar{x} = 2.53$ ) disagreed that more TV coverage would make a difference.



**Chart 21 If there was more TV coverage of women's sports more women would play – results for men and women**

The seventh item regarding whether women are second class citizens in sport in NI divided opinion: 42% agreed or strongly agreed while 34% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Gender ( $f(1,1022) = 6.42, p = 0.01$ ) had a significant impact on responses. Women ( $\bar{x} = 2.84$ ) were significantly more likely to agree with this proposition than men ( $\bar{x} = 3.02$ ), as demonstrated by the percentage results shown in Chart 22.



**Chart 22 Women are second class citizens in sport in NI – results for men and women**

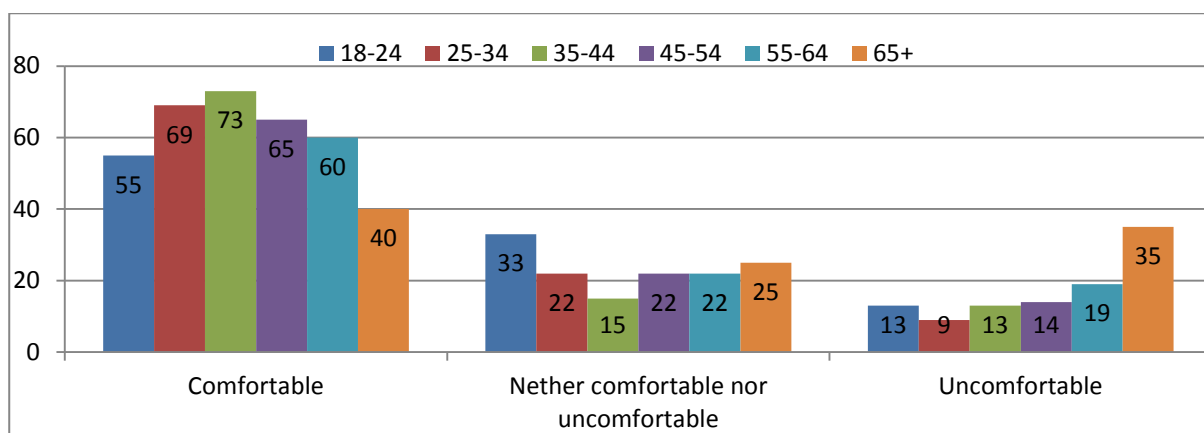
Three further questions related to the issue of social inclusion were located within other modules of the NILT survey. Two of them were part of the LGB issues section (Section E). The survey question read: 'Suppose you were taking part in a sport or exercise class, how comfortable or

uncomfortable would you be if you were using a changing room at the same time as...’ The items and percentage results are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6 LGB and Transgender Items**

	Comfortable (%)	Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (%)	Uncomfortable (%)
Someone that you knew was gay or lesbian?	60	22	19
Someone that you knew was transgender?	56	23	22

A slightly higher proportion of people reported discomfort with sharing a changing room with a transgender person (22%) than with a gay or lesbian person (19%). Percentage results for the first item by age are shown in Chart 23, highlighting that older people said they would feel more uncomfortable than younger age groups.



**Chart 23 How comfortable or uncomfortable would you be if you were using a changing room at the same time as someone you knew was gay or lesbian? – results by age**

Question 11 asked: ‘How would you feel if you or your children or your grandchildren’s sports team was being coached by someone from a minority ethnic community?’ Here, 69% said they would be ‘comfortable’, 23% ‘neither comfortable nor uncomfortable’ and 7% ‘uncomfortable’.

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### 4.6.2 Summary

Responses to these items revealed a wide range of opinion on diverse and often subtle aspects of sports exclusion. Almost two thirds of the sample (65%) believed that sport and leisure facilities were welcoming for older people, with only 16% disagreeing. Obviously, this question did not differentiate between different types of sporting facility; it may be that local leisure centres are perceived as accessible, but larger sporting venues less so. But this is a positive finding in any case. For the second item, 58% agreed that a gay or lesbian person would be welcome to join and play for most sports clubs in NI, while 18% disagreed. The latter figure, added to the fact that nearly one in four neither agreed nor disagreed, indicates a clear, albeit minority view, that gay and lesbian people continue to face exclusion from sport. The later item in Section E of the survey found a similar proportion (19%) actually reporting that they would feel uncomfortable using a changing room at the same time as someone who was gay or lesbian; a slightly higher proportion would feel uncomfortable using a changing room at the same time as someone who was transgender.

Perceptions of ethnic minority inclusion in sport were slightly more positive, with 65% agreeing that people from ethnic minority communities would be welcomed to join and play for most sports clubs in NI and 15% disagreeing. The later item found that just 7% of people would be uncomfortable if someone from an ethnic minority community was coaching the respondent's children or grandchildren. Around half of the sample believed that sports for disabled people were not taken seriously in NI, while 30% disagreed or strongly disagreed that this was the case.

The next three items examined gender issues in sport. The item regarding the sports opportunities for young mothers proved divisive, with similar proportions agreeing (42%) and disagreeing (40%) that for women with young families there is little chance of being able to keep up their sport or exercise. Responses were similar for men and women. Clearly, there exists a wide diversity of

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experiences in relation to this issue, but many people recognise the distinct challenges facing women with child-care responsibilities in continuing to be involved in sport and physical activity. In relation to the sixth item, surprisingly, women were more likely to disagree that more TV coverage of women's sports would have the effect of encouraging more women to play sport. Perhaps women who answered in this way simply lacked interest in sport and did not believe media coverage could change this. Opinion was again divided by the seventh item which asked whether women are second class citizens in sport in NI: 42% agreed or strongly agreed while 34% disagreed or strongly disagreed but women were most likely to agree. In sum, gender issues in sport continue to be controversial, with division between and within the sexes on key issues.

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## 4.7 Sport and change

### 4.7.1 Results and analysis

This question investigated levels of agreement with a series of statements related to sport and change in NI. Percentage results and mean rating scores are shown in Table 7. The impact of age and religion was investigated.

Table 7 Sport and Change

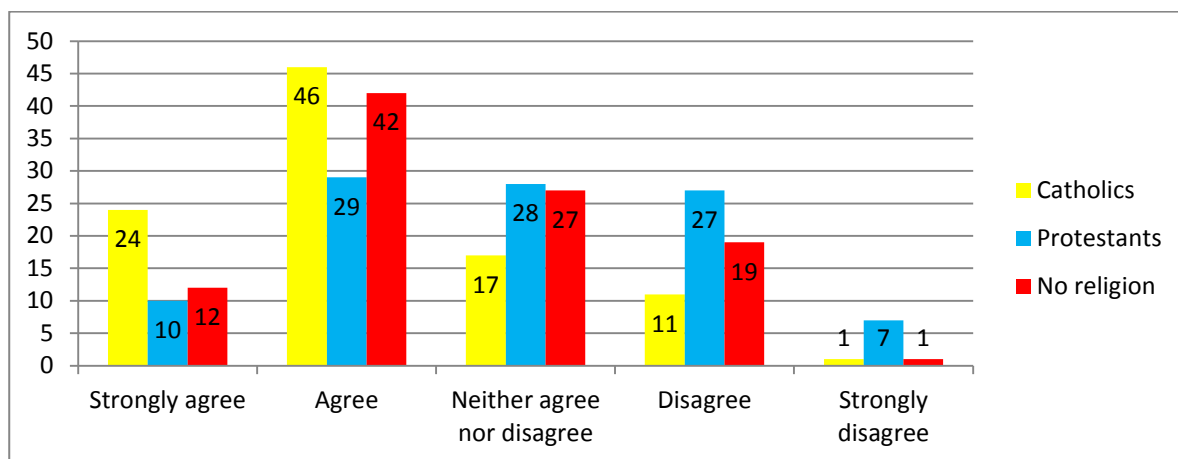
	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)		Mean rating score
I would like to see a Northern Ireland rugby team instead of an all-Ireland rugby team	3	15	26	37	19		3.52
I would like to see an all-Ireland soccer team instead of one each for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland	16	38	23	19	4		2.55
There should be more funding for cross-community sports projects	21	58	16	5	1		2.06
There should be more funding for cross-ethnic sports projects	18	53	20	6	3		2.23

(Rating scale: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree)

For the first item, age had a significant impact ( $f(5,1040) = 2.62$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ), in that there was significant difference between the 25-34 age group ( $\bar{x} = 3.35$ ) which was most favourable towards an NI rugby team and the 55-64 age group ( $\bar{x} = 3.74$ ) which was least favourable. Religion also had a significant impact ( $f(2,1040) = 7.59$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), in that Catholics were more likely to disagree with

this proposal ( $\bar{x} = 3.70$ ) than both the Protestant ( $\bar{x} = 3.41$ ) and no religion groups ( $\bar{x} = 3.42$ ). However, most people disagreed with the proposal, with only 18% of respondents overall expressing support for the proposal of an NI rugby team.

Much greater support was reported for the proposal of an all-Ireland soccer team, with 54% overall in favour. For this item, again, a significant impact was identified for both age ( $f(5,1040) = 3.78, p < 0.01$ ) and religion ( $f(2,1040) = 46.89, p < 0.01$ ). A significant difference existed between the 25-34 group ( $\bar{x} = 2.68$ ) which was least favourable towards an all-Ireland soccer team and the 55-64 age group ( $\bar{x} = 2.28$ ) which was most favourable. Catholics ( $\bar{x} = 2.20$ ) were significantly more favourable to this prospect than the no religion group ( $\bar{x} = 2.53$ ), with both of these groups more favourable than Protestants ( $\bar{x} = 2.91$ ). Percentage results by religion are shown in Chart 24.



**Chart 24 I would like to see an all-Ireland soccer team instead of one for NI and the Republic of Ireland – results by religion**

Results for the third item, which asked for views on whether there should be more funding for cross-community sports projects, were significant for both age ( $f(5,1097) = 4.51, p < 0.01$ ) and religion ( $f(2,1097) = 18.20, p < 0.01$ ). The 55-64 age group ( $\bar{x} = 1.94$ ) was most favourable, and was significantly more favourable towards more funding for these projects than the 65+ age group ( $\bar{x} = 2.20$ ) which was the least favourable age group. Catholics ( $\bar{x} = 1.89$ ) were significantly more favourable to greater funding than both Protestants ( $\bar{x} = 2.19$ ) and the no religion group ( $\bar{x} = 2.14$ ).

However, there was strong support for the idea overall, with 79% agreeing or strongly agreeing that there should be increased funding.

The fourth item asked the same question regarding cross-ethnic sports projects. Again there was strong support for these, with 71% of respondents in favour of greater funding for such initiatives. There was a significant religious difference ( $f(2,1087) = 23.20, p < 0.01$ ), in that Catholics ( $\bar{x} = 2.01$ ) were more likely to be in support of increased funding than both Protestants ( $\bar{x} = 2.40$ ) or the no religion group ( $\bar{x} = 2.35$ ).

The next question sought responses regarding other possible changes in sports in the future.

**Table 8 Expectations of Change in GAA and Soccer**

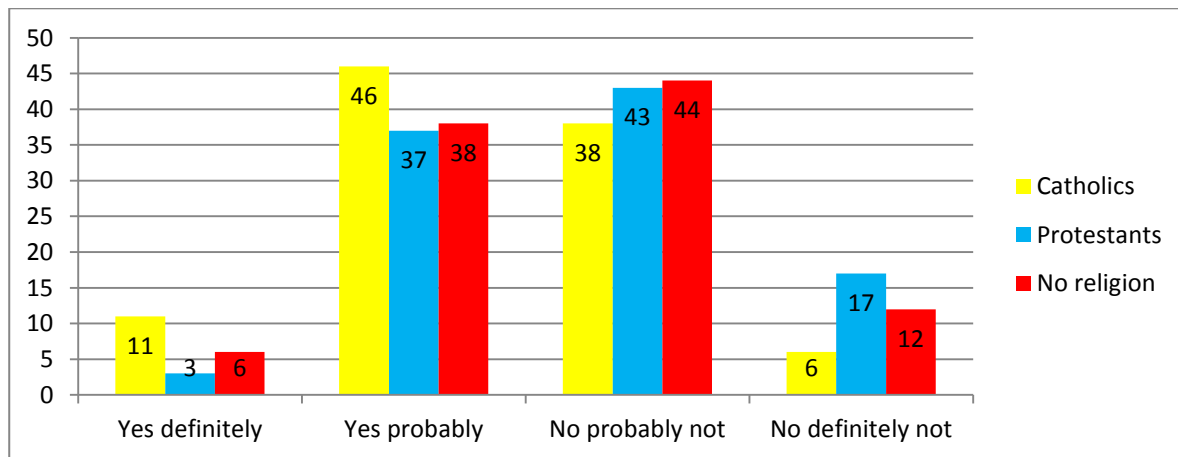
	Yes definitely (%)	Yes probably (%)	No probably not (%)	No definitely not (%)		Mean rating score
In ten years, more Protestants will attend GAA matches	7	41	41	12		2.57
In ten years, more Catholics will attend Northern Ireland international soccer matches	5	46	38	10		2.53

(Rating scale: 1 = yes definitely, 2 = yes probably, 3 = no probably not, 4 = no definitely not)

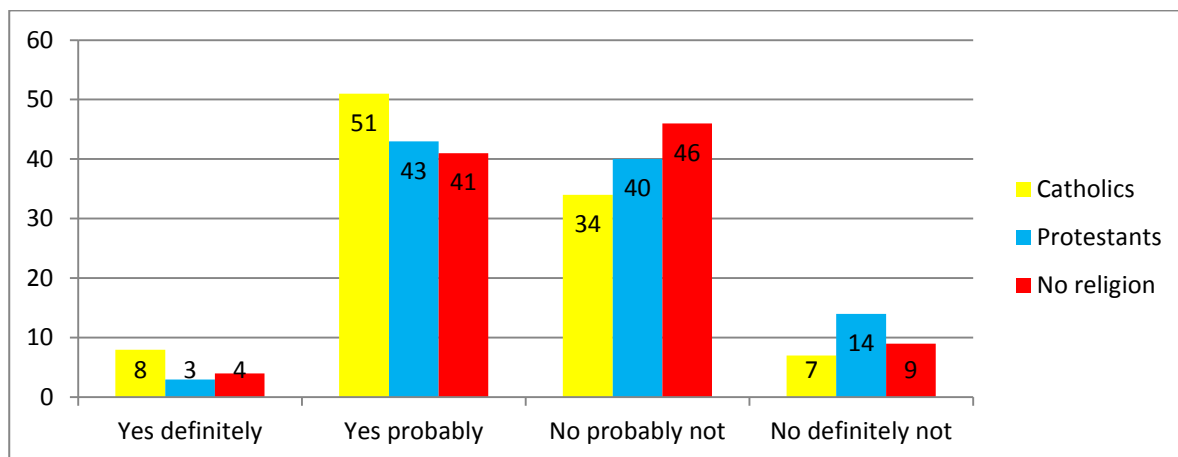
The first item revealed uncertainty about whether more Protestants will attend GAA matches in the future: 48% answered yes definitely or yes probably while 53% answered no probably not or no definitely not. Religion was significant ( $f(2,1165) = 19.73, p < 0.01$ ), in that Protestants ( $\bar{x} = 3.30$ ) and the no religion group ( $\bar{x} = 3.14$ ) were both more pessimistic than Catholics ( $\bar{x} = 2.84$ ). Likewise, opinion was divided over the sixth item which asked whether respondents felt that more



Catholics will attend NI international soccer matches in the future: 51% answered yes definitely or yes probably while 48% answered no probably not or no definitely not. Religion was significant ( $f(2,1165) = 12.11, p < 0.01$ ), in that Protestants ( $\bar{x} = 3.15$ ) and the no religion group ( $\bar{x} = 3.13$ ) were both significantly more likely than Catholics ( $\bar{x} = 2.82$ ) to disagree. Percentage results by religion for these two items are shown in Charts 25 and 26.



**Chart 25 In ten years' time, more Protestants will attend GAA matches – results by religion**



**Chart 26 In ten years' time, more Catholics will attend NI international soccer matches – results by religion**

## 4.7.2 Summary

The contrast between how rugby and soccer are organised on the island of Ireland was examined in the first two items which sought to investigate levels of support for the status quo and for change. Just under 20% wished to see an NI rugby team instead of the all-Ireland team; the fact that the

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Ireland rugby team encompasses the whole of the island seems to attract little controversy, perhaps given the fact that there is also a strong ‘Ulster’ dimension to the sport. By contrast, just over half of the sample wished to see a change in soccer, with the NI and Republic of Ireland teams replaced by an all-Ireland team. However, a majority of these respondents were from the Catholic community which traditionally feels less affinity with the NI team, or from the no religion group. Thus, while 70% of Catholics agreed with the proposition, a minority of Protestants (39%) agreed. Nevertheless, it is striking that over half of all respondents would like to see the demise of the NI team as it is currently constituted. Of course, one factor here is comparative success. The Republic of Ireland soccer team has, in recent years, been more successful than the NI team and so the desire for success may be a factor. Should performance levels change then these proportions may also change. Likewise, the recent performances of the all-island rugby team may also be influential here.

The third item revealed very strong support (79%) for increased funding for cross-community sports projects. This is in keeping with the earlier finding that a solid majority of the sample believed that sport was a good way to break down barriers between Protestants and Catholics (p. 14). Similarly, a slightly lower but still large majority (71%) was in favour of more funding for cross-ethnic sports projects. For both these items, Catholics were significantly more in favour than Protestants.

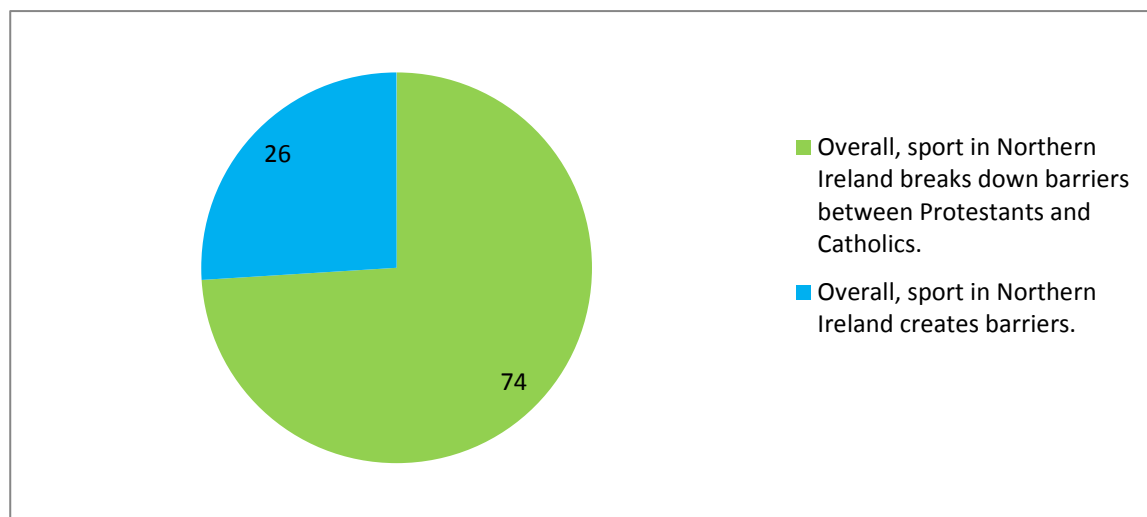
The next two items sought to gauge whether respondents felt optimistic or pessimistic about the likelihood of greater religious diversity in sport. Results were consistent for both: similar proportions agreed and disagreed that more Protestants would attend GAA matches in ten years’ time, and that more Catholics would attend NI soccer matches. For both items, Protestants were more pessimistic than Catholics – a recurring trend in this survey.

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## 4.8 Sport and peace

### 4.8.1 Results and analysis

Question 13 asked respondents whether they believed that, on balance, sport breaks down barriers between Protestants and Catholics. Almost three quarters of respondents (74%) held a positive view of sport in this regard (Chart 27).



**Chart 27 Does sport break down or create barriers in NI?**

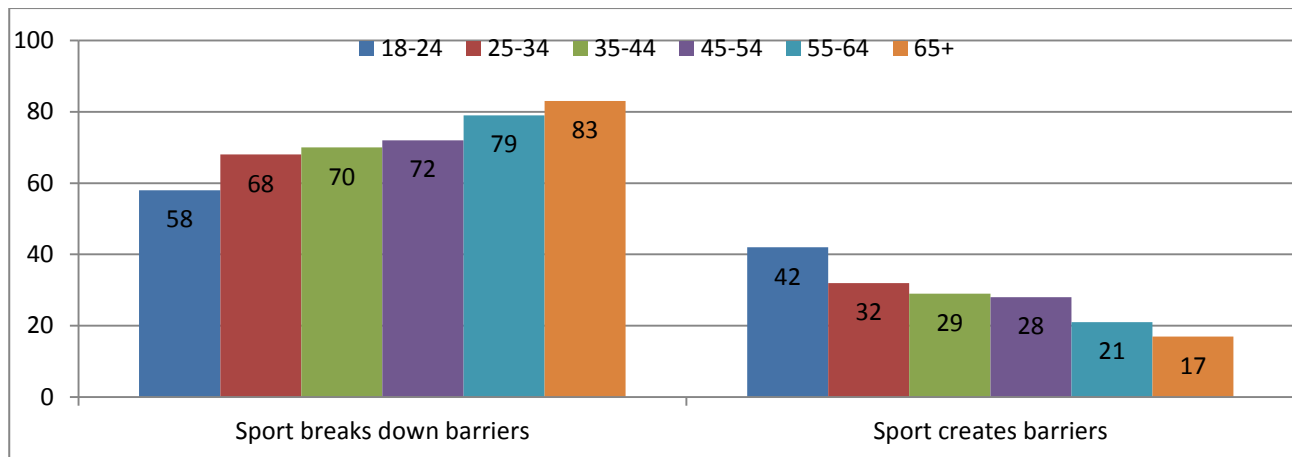
A logistic regression was performed with the belief that sport breaks down barriers as the dependent variable. Independent variables were age, religion, gender, occupation level<sup>5</sup>, qualifications<sup>6</sup>, and amount of sport played (Question 16 below). The full model significantly predicted belief that sport breaks down barriers (omnibus chi-square = 33.96, df = 9,  $p < 0.01$ ). Age was significant, in that an

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<sup>5</sup> In the NILT survey, occupational information was derived using the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2010. The SOC2010 information was used to derive the National Statistics Socio-Economic (NS SEC) variable. This is: 1.1 Large employers and higher managerial and administrative occupations, 1.2 Higher professional occupations, 2 Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations, 3 Intermediate occupations, 4 Small employers and own account workers, 5 Lower supervisory and technical occupations, 6 Semi-routine occupations, 7 Routine occupations, 8 Never worked and long-term unemployed. For the purposes of analysis, these categories were re-coded into three groups which are referred to in this Report as 'Level 1' (1.1, 1.2, 2), 'Level 2' (3, 4, 5) and 'Level 3' (6, 7, 8) occupation categories.

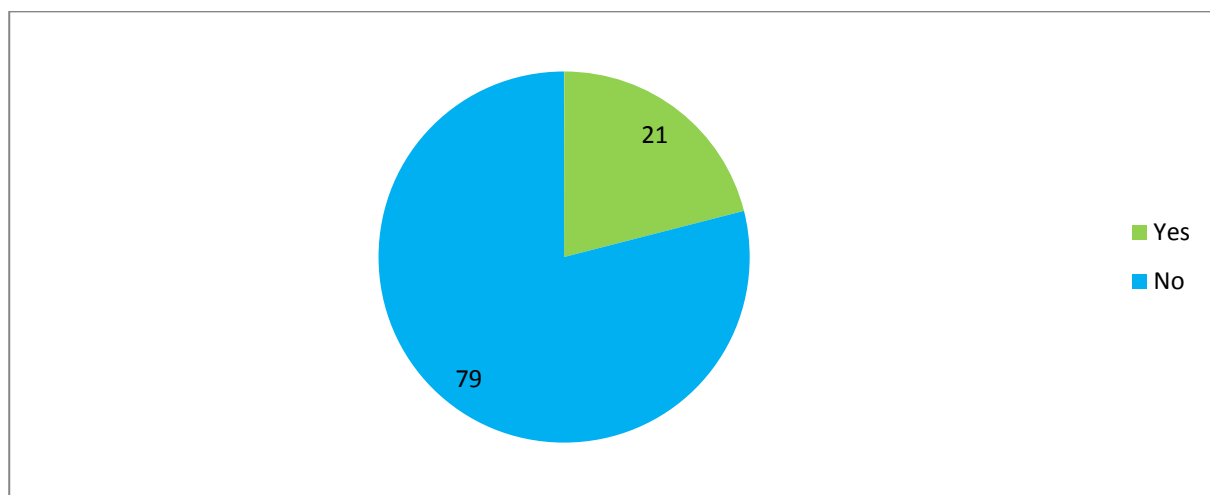
<sup>6</sup> The information on respondents' qualifications gathered by NILT was re-coded into two categories, A-level and above, and GCSE and below.

increase of one age category was associated with an increase in the odds of agreement by a factor of 1.29. This trend can be seen in the percentages presented in Chart 28.



**Chart 28 Does sport break down or create barriers in NI? – results by age**

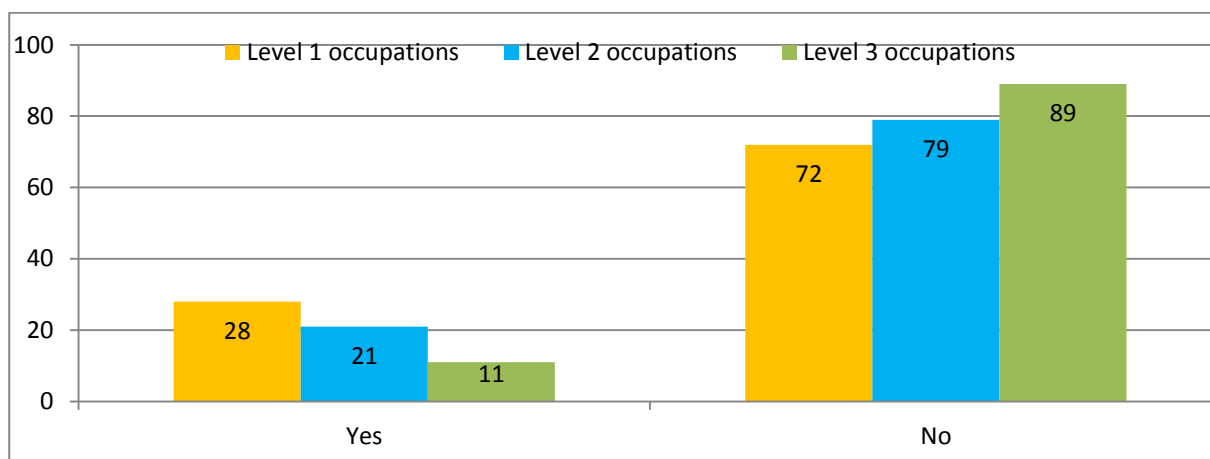
Question 14 asked whether respondents had ever taken part in a cross-community sporting initiative. Results are shown in Chart 29.



**Chart 29 Have you ever taken part in a cross-community sporting initiative?**

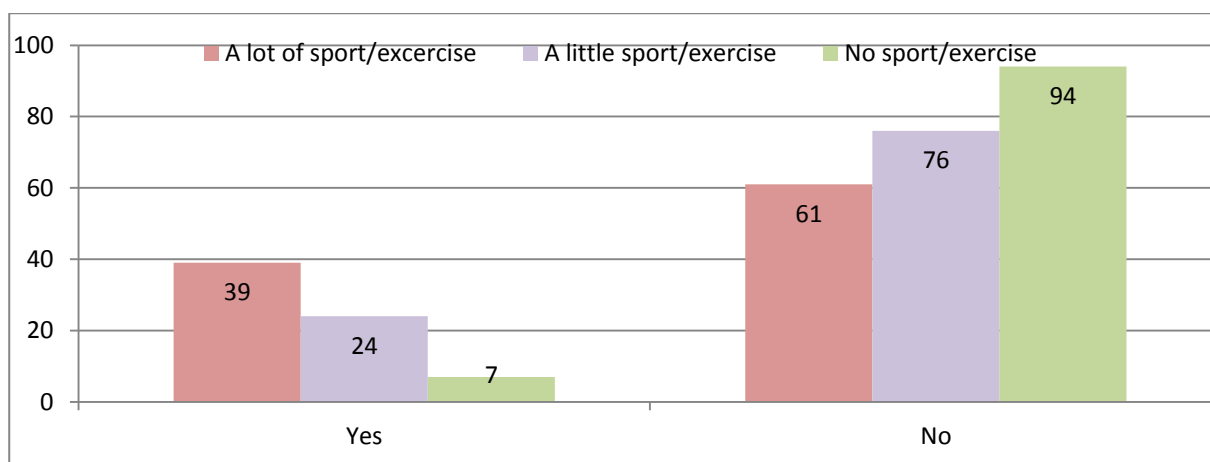
Just over one in five people (21%) had taken part in such an initiative. A logistic regression was performed with taking part as the dependent variable. Independent variables were age, religion, gender, occupation level, qualifications, and amount of sport played. The full model significantly

predicted taking part (omnibus chi-square = 188.2, df = 9,  $p < 0.01$ ). All the independent variables were significant. An increase of each age category was associated with a decrease in the odds of taking part by a factor of 0.8. Women were less likely to have taken part than men by a factor of 0.7. Protestants were only slightly less likely to have taken part than Catholics, but religion was significant in that the no religion group was less likely to have taken part than Catholics by a factor of 0.55. People in the Level 1 and 2 occupation classifications were, respectively, 1.77 and 1.7 times more likely to have taken part than people in the Level 3 occupation classification. Percentage results according to occupation classification are shown in Chart 30.



**Chart 30 Have you ever taken part in a cross-community sporting initiative? – results by occupation level**

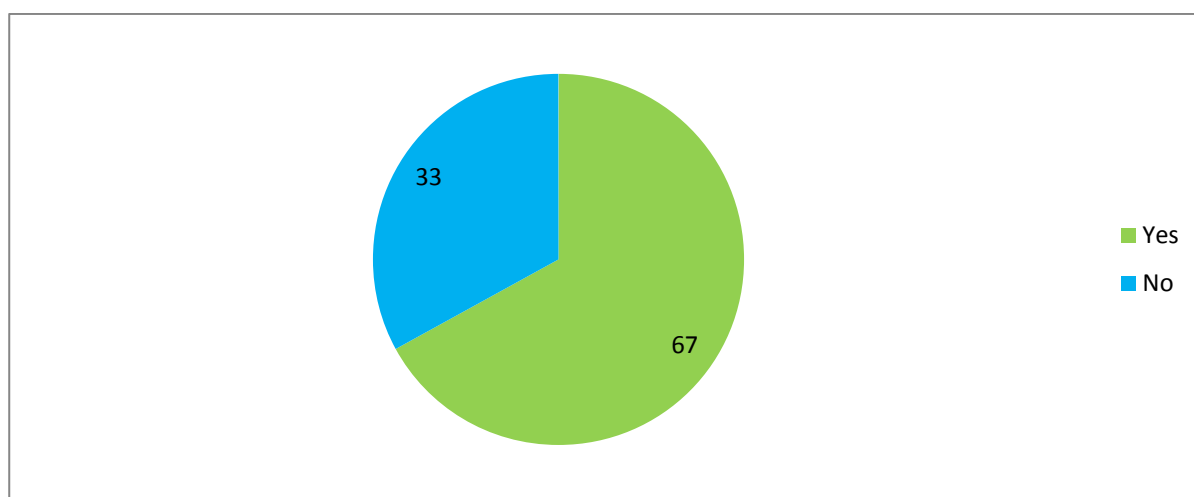
People with A-levels and above were 1.74 times more likely to have taken part than people with GCSEs and below. Finally, people who reported doing ‘a lot’ of sport or exercise over the last twelve months were 6.9 times more likely than those who reported doing no exercise to have taken part, while those who reported doing ‘a little’ sport or exercise were 4.1 more likely to have taken part than those who reported doing no exercise. Again, this is illustrated by the percentage results shown in Chart 31.



**Chart 31 Have you ever taken part in a cross-community sporting initiative? Results by reported amount of sport/exercise in the last 12 months**

A follow up question asked those who had taken part in a cross-community sporting initiative whether they believed that it had helped to break down barriers between Protestants and Catholics. Here, 91% of those who had taken part believed that it had been effective.

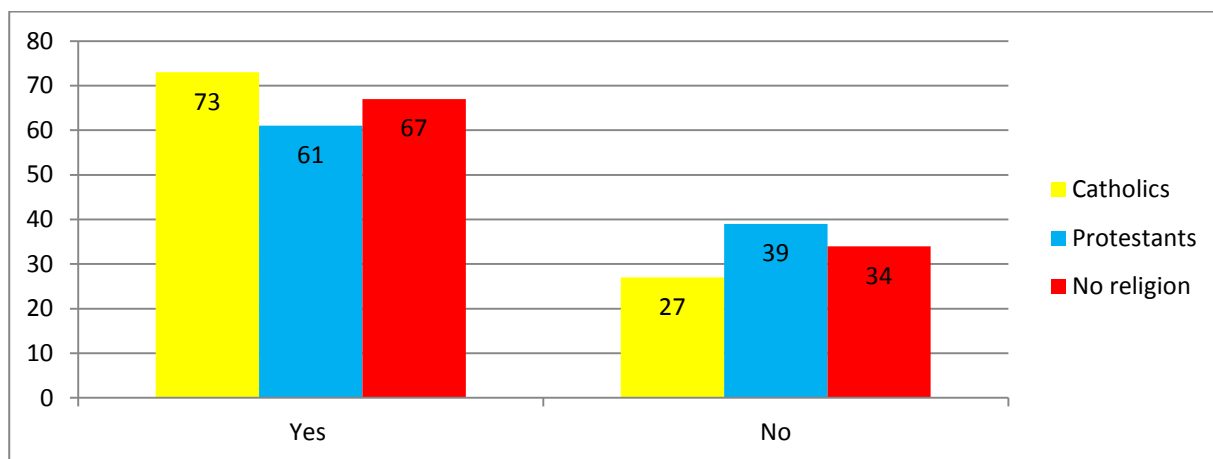
Question 15 asked all respondents whether they thought cross-community sporting initiatives were effective in breaking down barriers between Protestants and Catholics. As Chart 32 shows, over two-thirds of respondents (67%) answered in the affirmative.



**Chart 32 Do you think that in general cross-community sporting initiatives help break down barriers between Protestants and Catholics?**

A logistic regression was performed with the belief that cross-community sporting initiatives help

break down barriers as the dependent variable. Independent variables were age, religion, gender, occupation level, qualifications, and amount of sport played. The full model significantly predicted belief that cross-community sporting initiatives help break down barriers (omnibus chi-square = 161.52,  $df = 9$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Religion was significant: Protestants were less likely than Catholics to believe that sports projects were effective by a factor of 0.53, and the no religion group was less likely than Catholics to believe that sports projects were effective by a factor of 0.65. Percentage results by religion are shown in Chart 33.



**Chart 33 Do you think that in general cross-community sporting initiatives help break down barriers between Protestants and Catholics? – results by religion**

Occupation level was significant: those in the Level 1 occupation classification were 1.7 times more likely than those in the Level 3 classification to believe that sports projects were effective, while those in the Level 2 classification were 1.43 times more likely than those in the Level 3 classification. The amount of reported sport/exercise was also significant: those who said they had done ‘a lot’ of sport/exercise were 5.43 times more likely than those who said they had done no sport/exercise to believe that sports projects were effective while those who had done ‘a little’ sport/exercise were 4.08 times more likely.

Question 16 sought respondents’ agreement with three further statements regarding sport in NI. Percentage results and mean rating scores are shown in Table 9 below.

**Table 9 Sport and Change**

	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)	Mean rating score
Sports in NI are more open and inclusive for all types of people now than they were 10 years ago	17	67	12	4	1	2.05
If there were more opportunities for participating in sport in this area there would be less anti-social behaviour	19	51	17	11	2	2.26
I don't know much about what sport is on offer in my area	13	31	12	34	11	2.99

(Rating scale: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree)

As shown in Table 9, the first item revealed a strong perception of increasing inclusivity of sport in NI, with 84% believing sports to be more open and inclusive than ten years ago. Tests for significance were carried out regarding age and religion. Religion was found to be significant ( $f(2,1027) = 4.38, p = 0.01$ ). There was no significant difference between Protestants ( $\bar{x} = 2.04$ ) and Catholics ( $\bar{x} = 2$ ) but Catholics were significantly more likely than the no religion group ( $\bar{x} = 2.17$ ) to believe that sport had become more inclusive.

The second item revealed strong support for the idea that sports provision can reduce anti-social behaviour, with 70% in favour. However, the third item regarding people's knowledge of local sports opportunities divided opinion: 44% agreed or strongly agreed that they lacked knowledge, and 45% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Analysis revealed a significant impact for both gender ( $f(1,1157) = 38.05, p < 0.01$ ) and age ( $f(5,1157) = 5.88, p < 0.01$ ). Women ( $\bar{x} = 2.79$ ) were significantly more likely to agree than men ( $\bar{x} = 3.22$ ) that they did not know much about what sport



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was on offer in their area, while agreement increased gradually with age.

#### 4.8.2 Summary

Given the history of division in sport in NI, it is perhaps surprising, and positive, that such a strong majority of the sample (74%) said that they believed that overall sport brought Protestants and Catholics together rather than separated them. Less positive is the fact that young people were markedly less optimistic on this point than older people, with agreement with the item increasing with age.

A fifth of the sample had taken part in a cross-community sporting initiative. The profile of those who take part in these initiatives is revealed by the analysis which shows that younger people, Catholics, males, those in higher level occupations, with higher qualifications, and who participate in sport regularly, were more likely to have taken part in these initiatives. Significantly, an overwhelming majority of people who had taken part in such activities believed them to be effective. Two thirds of the sample overall believed that cross-community sporting initiatives were effective, with Protestants less convinced than Catholics. Furthermore, occupation level, qualification level and degree of participation in sport also had significant impacts, with people in lower level occupations, with fewer qualifications and who do not play sport regularly, more likely to be sceptical about these initiatives.

There was a large degree of support overall for the idea that sports in NI were more open and inclusive than ten years ago (84%). This is a strong endorsement of the inclusivity efforts that have been made by sports bodies (see section 2.4.1 of the Literature Review). A total of 70% of

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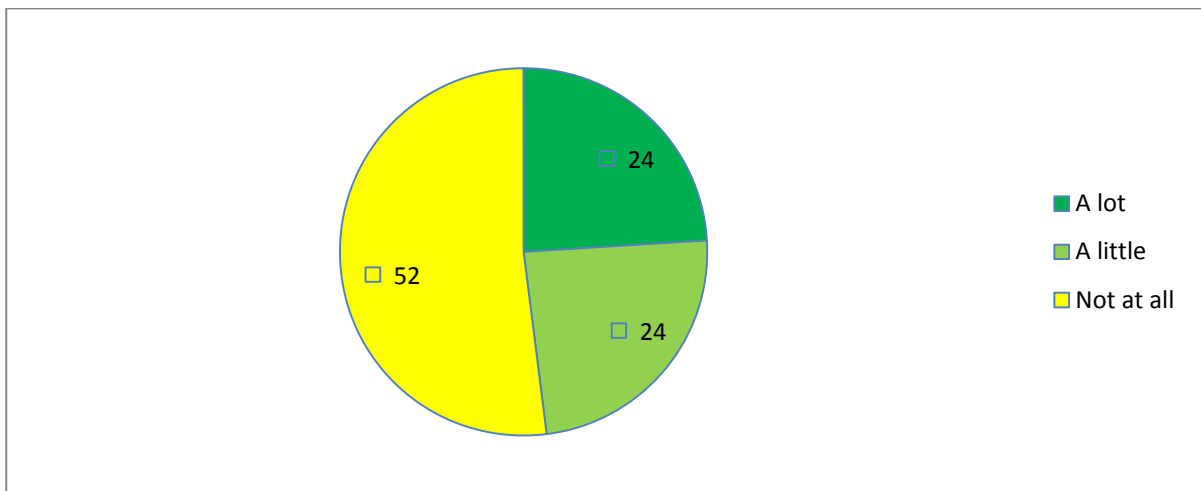
respondents agreed with the proposal that more sports provision in their area would reduce anti-social behaviour – a finding which is in keeping with the trend throughout the survey of respondents’ perception of sport’s positive social impact. Those who did not agree may have doubted sport’s potential in this area, or simply not deemed their area to suffer from anti-social behaviour. The final item regarding people’s knowledge of local sports opportunities divided opinion, with almost identical proportions agreeing and disagreeing that they were adequately informed. This is unsurprising given the varying levels of interest in sport within the sample. In keeping with their relative lower level of involvement in sport, women and older people were more likely to say that they did not know much about what sport was in offer in their area.

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## 4.9 Sports participation and barriers

### 4.9.1 Results and analysis

Question 17 asked how often respondents had taken part in sport or exercise over the last 12 months. Overall results are presented in Chart 34. Just over half of the sample (52%) reported that they had not taken part in any physical activity over the previous year.



**Chart 34** How often have you participated in sport or exercise over the last twelve months?

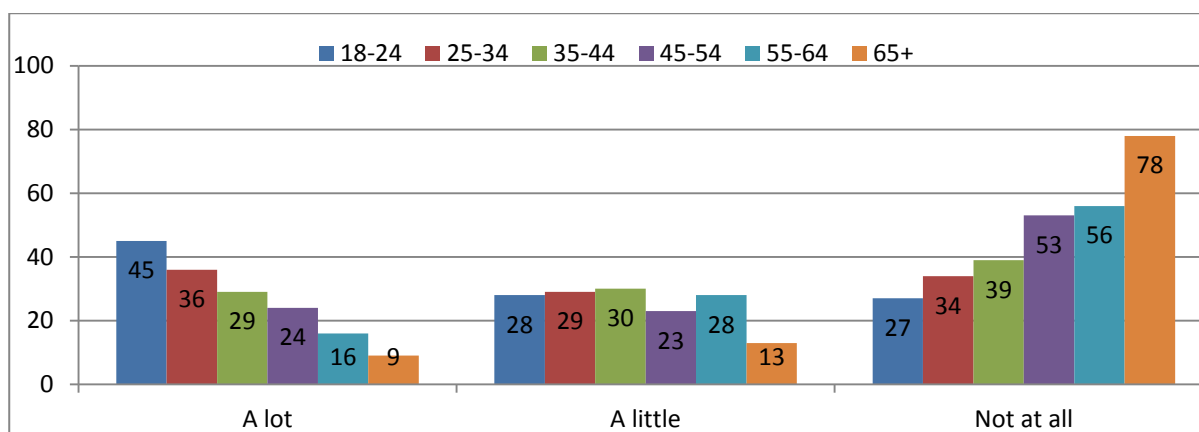
A multinomial regression was performed with amount of activity as the dependent variable. Independent variables were age, gender, occupation level and qualifications. All variables were significant. As shown in Table 10, in relation to age, the 18-24 category was 16.86 times more likely to report ‘a lot’ of activity than the 65+ group, the 25-34 group was 9.32 times more likely, the 35-44 group was 4.8 times more likely, the 45-54 group 3.4 times more likely and the 55-64 group 2.3 times more likely. Men were twice as likely to engage in a lot of exercise than women and people with Level 1 occupations were more than 4 times (4.43) more likely to engage in a lot of exercise than those in Level 3 occupations.

The influence of the independent variables decreased with those participants who indicated they did a little exercise. Age was still a significant factor in predicting the likelihood of participating in a little exercise with more younger people participating in sport than older people, gender was not a significant factor in predicting ‘A little exercise’. Levels 1 and 2 occupations were more likely to engage in a little exercise than Level 3.

Table 10 How often have you played sport or taken part in any kind of exercise over the last 12 months? – multinomial logistic regression (non-significant results are shaded)

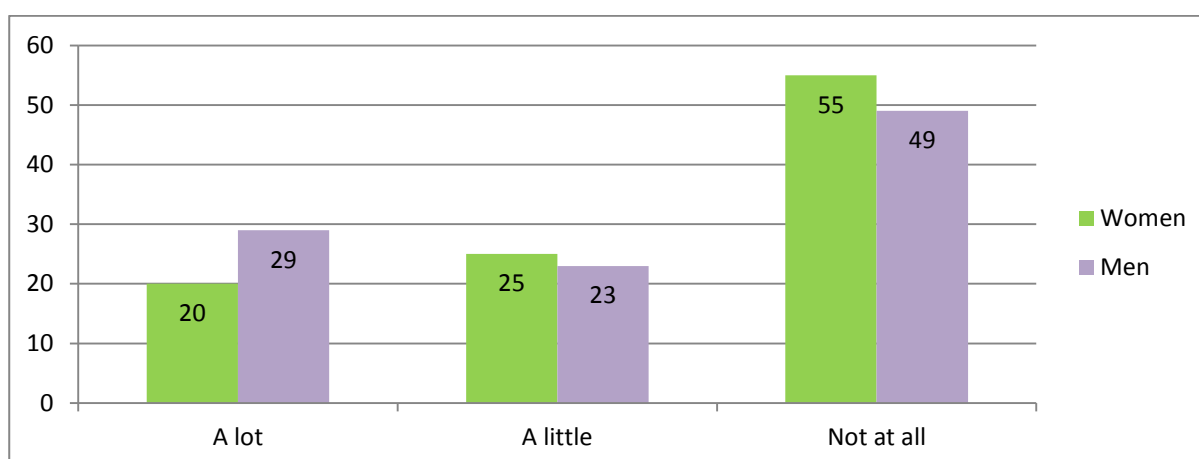
Demographics	A lot	A Little
	Exp(B)	Exp(B)
18-24	16.86	7.143
25-34	9.32	5.442
35-44	4.8	3.817
45-54	3.4	2.482
55-64	2.3	2.805
65+	1	1
Men	2	1.114
Women	1	1
Level 1 occupations	4.43	2.647
Level 2 occupations	2.41	2.541
Level 3 occupations	1	1
A-Levels and above	2.23	1.476
GCSEs and below	1	1

Chart 35 displays percentage results for age, illustrating the higher levels of activity among the young: 45% of 18-24 year olds said they had participated ‘a lot’ compared to just 16% of 55-64 year olds and 9% of those in the 65+ category.



**Chart 35** How often have you participated in sport or exercise over the last twelve months? – results by age

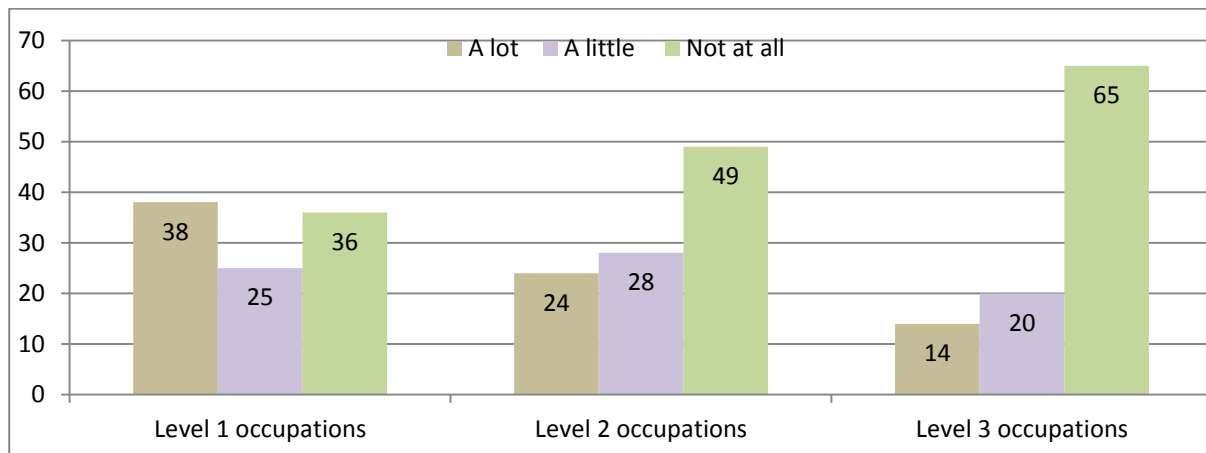
As shown in Table 10, men were twice as likely as women to report doing ‘a lot’ of exercise. Chart 36 below contains percentage results by gender; 29% of men said they had taken part ‘a lot’, compared to 20% of women.



**Chart 36** How often have you participated in sport or exercise over the last twelve months? – results by gender

Results also varied sharply according to occupation level. As shown in Table 10, those in the Level 1 occupation classification were 4.43 times more likely than those in the Level 3 occupation classification to say they participated in sport and exercise ‘a lot’, and those in the Level 2 occupation classification were 2.41 times more likely than those in the Level 3 occupation classification. Percentage results for occupation levels are shown in Chart 37, indicating the much lower levels of sport and exercise among those in ‘lower’ occupations. Only 14% of those in the

Level 1 occupation classification said they did no sport or exercise compared to nearly two thirds (65%) of those in the Level 3 classification. Similarly, those with A-Levels and above were 2.23 times likely than those with GCSEs and below to say they had played ‘a lot’ of sport.



**Chart 37 How often have you participated in sport or exercise over the last 12 months? – results by occupation level**

A follow up question asked what sport or exercise people participated in most often. The most popular responses and the frequency with which they were mentioned are shown in Table 11:

Table 11 Popular sports/activities

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Walking/hiking	153
Gym	99
Soccer	75
Running	68
Cycling	52
Golf	46

Question 18 asked about barriers to sports participation. The questionnaire read: ‘Sometimes people are put off doing sport or exercise for particular reasons. Here is a list of things that people have

told us put them off doing a particular sport or exercise. Have any of these ever put you off doing a particular sport or type of exercise during your lifetime?’ Results are shown in Table 12.

Table 12 Barriers to Sports Participation

	%
Just not interested	39
I didn’t have the time to do it	25
It cost too much	18
There were no facilities nearby	13
I didn’t think I would be good enough at it	12
I’m too old/in poor health	9
I would have needed to find child care	9
I felt embarrassed about how I looked	7
I didn’t like the changing rooms because they were communal	4
It wasn’t single sex	2
No disabled access	1
People like me would not fit in	1

The most frequently selected barriers were lack of interest and lack of time. Unsurprisingly, given work and family commitments, the age category that reported lack of time most often was the 35-44 group; 29% were from this group, with 25-34 the next largest group at 19%. Also, as expected, most of those who reported ‘too old/in poor health’ were from the 65+ age group (61%).

The next most frequently mentioned barrier was cost. The lower occupation level might be expected to mention this most often. This was the case, although responses were relatively evenly spread across the three occupation levels, with 28% of those who reported cost as a barrier coming from the higher occupation level, 35% from the middle level and 37% from the lower level.

Others barriers were overwhelmingly experienced by women more than men. These include, ‘I didn’t like the changing rooms because they were communal’, ‘I would have needed to find child care’, ‘I felt embarrassed about how I looked’ and ‘It wasn’t single sex’. Of those who said they did

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not like the communal changing rooms, 86% were female. Of those who said they would have needed to find child care, 80% were female. Of those who said they felt embarrassed about how they looked, 81% were female. Of those who said it wasn't single sex, 78% were female. Furthermore, a majority of those who said that lack of time had acted as a barrier to playing sport were women (59%).

#### 4.9.2 Summary

The finding that half of the sample had not taken part in sport or exercise in the last year at all is noteworthy, given the official medical recommendations about the importance of regular exercise, and the well-known benefits of sport to physical and mental wellbeing. Gender, age and class impacted upon the level of reported exercise, with women, older people and those in 'lower' level occupations and with fewer qualifications reporting lower amounts of exercise. A higher proportion of men (29%) said they had taken part 'a lot', compared to 20% of women, while 45% of 18-24 year olds said they had participated 'a lot' compared to just 9% of those in the 65+ category. Only 14% of those in the Level 1 occupation classification said they did no sport or exercise compared to 65% of those in the Level 3 classification. With regard to barriers reported by respondents, none was mentioned very frequently. However, a number of the barriers were disproportionately experienced by women.



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## 4.10 Conclusion

Key findings of the quantitative phase of the SESNI project may be summarised as follows.

- The role of schools in sport produced a range of positive and negative findings. While 58% of males felt that their experience at school had given them a lifelong love of sport, only 36% of females agreed with this proposition; indeed 52% of females disagreed or strongly disagreed. A majority of the sample (59%) agreed with the proposition that boys' sports were seen as more important at school with just 23% disagreeing. These findings are in line with previous research and this raises issues for the provision of school sports for girls. There was also a majority view (63%) that schools tend to become obsessed with a single sport at the expense of others.
- In terms of segregation, the majority of respondents (51%) agreed that segregated schools are a major cause of segregation in sport, with just over one-fifth (21%) of the sample disagreeing. These figures were similar for Protestants, Catholics and people of no religion.
- There was strong endorsement of the social benefits of sport in relation to uniting communities and providing a positive outlet for young people. Sport was identified as a good way to bring Protestants and Catholics together and as an activity that on balance broke down barriers between the communities rather than drove them apart.
- Two-thirds of the sample (67%) believed that sports-based peacebuilding projects were effective in breaking down barriers between Protestants and Catholics. Of those who had taken part in such a project, the figure for people who believed the projects to be effective was 91%. Interestingly, while 61% of Protestants overall believed the projects to be effective, 93% of Protestants who had taken part in them thought them to be effective. Accordingly, the sample agreed that sports-based

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peacebuilding projects were worthy of enhanced funding, as were cross-ethnic sports projects.

- However, the survey evidence also shows that sports-based peacebuilding initiatives have limited reach. Younger people, people in higher level occupations, with higher qualifications, and who take part in sport regularly, were most likely to have taken part in these initiatives.
- There was no clear desire for change in existing sporting cultures, nor was it certain that sports actually would move in the direction of greater religious diversity in the future. Many respondents saw nothing wrong with different sports or teams being single-identity, many did not want national anthems to become less prominent in sports, and many were indifferent about whether the main sports should strive for greater religious diversity.
- Respondents' interests in sports on TV, and attending sports fixtures, largely followed the traditional religious divide. Many people judged that the main sporting bodies and their venues had much further to travel to become universally acceptable and accessible.
- The survey findings highlight the comparatively minor role that sport plays in the lives of women: they watch less sport on TV than men, enjoy sport at school less than men, and participate in sport less than men. However, there was a division of opinion on issues such as media coverage, family responsibilities, and single sex leisure provision.
- There were few clear trends in relation to how age impacted upon attitudes, although, interestingly, in many cases it was younger people and older people that displayed the most conservative or pessimistic views. Certainly, younger people did not display markedly more optimistic or progressive views in relation to the various issues than older generations.

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- Older people were emphatically less inclined or able to participate in sport or attend sporting venues; having said that, only a small proportion of the sample believed that there was an accessibility problem for older people in relation to sporting and leisure facilities.
  - In relation to LGB and transgender issues, a minority of people showed an aversion to such individuals in a sporting context, and identified that sports clubs may not be welcoming environments for them.

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## 5 Conclusion

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## 5.1 Main findings

The SESNI project has mapped public attitudes to inclusion/exclusion in the context of sport in NI. Through an extensive Literature Review, in-depth semi-structured interviews with the general public and a quantitative survey, the project has generated a wealth of data regarding experiences of sport and leisure in NI. Conclusions have been drawn based on each of the three stages of the research. The purpose of this section is to summarise and synthesise the overall key findings of the project.

*There is a widespread public belief in the peacebuilding capacity of sport.* A significant majority of the survey sample (86%) believed that sport was a good way to break down barriers between Protestants and Catholics, while 67% believed that sports-based peacebuilding projects were effective in breaking down barriers between the two communities. Of those who had taken part in such a project, the figure for people who believed the projects to be effective was 91%. Accordingly, the sample felt that sports-based peacebuilding projects were worthy of enhanced funding. Other findings regarding the perceived positive impact of sport included: 74% of respondents believed that, on balance, sport broke down barriers between Protestants and Catholics in NI rather than divided them; and, 84% believed sports in NI to be more open and inclusive than ten years ago. Strong support for sport as a vehicle for peacebuilding was also found in the qualitative research. However, sports-based peacebuilding initiatives need to reach target groups that are presently under-represented. Analysis of the survey results showed that younger people, males, those in higher level occupations, with higher qualifications, and who participated in sport regularly, were most likely to have taken part in these initiatives.

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*Most people are content with religious division in sport, and many do not believe there will be significant change in the religious make-up of some sports.* For instance, 57% of survey respondents felt that there was nothing wrong with different sports or teams being for Protestants or Catholics; responses were similar among Protestants and Catholics, and across age categories. This suggests a strong level of support for the extant systems of separate sports for Protestants and Catholics, or at least a reluctance to challenge the existing religious make-up of sports. Furthermore, respondents were evenly divided with regard to whether they believed that, in ten years' time, more Catholics would attend NI international soccer matches or more Protestants would attend GAA matches. Many people would therefore seem to be unaware of, or sceptical about, the inclusivity efforts made by the IFA and GAA, and/or do not believe that the general trajectory of community relations is towards greater integration and mixing.

*There is a widespread public perception of the on-going link between religious division within the schools sector and sports segregation.* 51% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that segregated schools are a major cause of segregation in sport, with just over one-fifth (21%) of the sample disagreeing. These figures were similar for Protestants, Catholics and people of no religion. Nearly all interviewees provided examples of this link in their own lives.

*Sporting colours, emblems and venues continue to be perceived as politico-religious markers.* Interviewees provided rich detail and telling anecdotes to illustrate the 'otherness' of certain sports venues and the impact of territorial segregation on sport and leisure choices. Sports emblems, particularly belonging to certain soccer teams and the GAA, were regarded as identifying someone's community background, and potentially causing threat/anxiety in particular areas.

*The topic of national anthems in sport in NI is contentious.* Opinion, as gauged by the survey, was closely divided, in that 36% agreed that anthems should not be part of sport in NI while 42%

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disagreed. Protestants were more attached to anthems than Catholics, with the youngest age category in the study (18-24 years) showing strongest support for anthems. This is in keeping with the wider picture regarding the contentious nature of culture and symbols in post-Good Friday Agreement NI and how such conflict has intensified the importance of symbols, particularly within the Protestant community, especially since the flag protests that began in the winter of 2012-13. It may be surmised that there is a connection between the buoyant levels of support for anthems in sport and the fact that the flags issue remains unresolved at the political level.

*Participation and interest in soccer, rugby and Gaelic games, continues to follow the traditional communal lines.* As measured by the interviews and the survey questions on television viewing of sports and willingness to attend sports fixtures, Gaelic games remain the preserve of Catholics. Rugby, as a sport, retains its Protestant and middle-class associations, though the Ulster and Ireland teams do attract Catholic support. Interest in soccer is common to both Protestants and Catholics, though differences and divisions exist in relation to certain teams. For instance, while almost equal numbers of Protestants and Catholics had watched English and Scottish Premier League soccer in the last year, 23% of Protestants had watched NI international soccer matches ‘a lot’ compared to only 9% of Catholics.

*The GAA remains largely outside of the experience of most Protestants.* Only 1% of Protestants had watched ‘a lot’ of Gaelic football in the last year compared to 31% of Catholics. Only 39% of Protestants said they would attend a match in Casement Park if offered tickets compared to 78% of Catholics. Protestant interviewees had not encountered Gaelic sports at school or in their community. While some Protestant interviewees said they were alienated from the GAA due to its Irish nationalist ethos (see below), for most Protestant interviewees, Gaelic sports were simply unknown, played according to rules that were not understood, and in locations where Protestants rarely or never ventured.

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*Many Protestants believe that the GAA could and should be doing more to make Gaelic sports amenable to their tradition.* Some 40% of Protestants agreed that the GAA was taking active steps to welcome all traditions, compared to 72% of Catholics. Qualitative data from the interviews revealed Protestant disapproval of the GAA for its perceived Catholic ethos, former exclusion of the security forces, use of Irish symbols and the naming of certain GAA venues after individuals associated with republicanism. However, at the same time, there was positive recognition of the community spirit, family-friendly culture and organisational acumen of the GAA, as well as respect for Gaelic sports themselves.

*Some Catholics believe the GAA could and should be doing more to welcome all traditions.* Thus, 28% of Catholics disagreed that the GAA was taking active steps to welcome all traditions, while 78% said they would like to see more Protestants playing Gaelic sports. Although most Catholic interviewees were comfortable in a GAA environment, and, for some, the organisation had played a key part in their lives, they nonetheless understood why many people from the Protestant tradition viewed the organisation differently. Some Catholics interviewees were also uncomfortable with the continuing Irish nationalist associations of the GAA.

*Perceptions of sectarianism surrounding NI soccer persist among some people.* This emerged most clearly in the qualitative data. A small number of survey respondents reported that sectarianism among fans at Windsor Park would put them off attending. A number of interviewees regarded soccer as divisive and some had had negative experiences at NI international matches in the past. That said, the role of the media in creating these impressions, highlighting incidents of trouble to those who had little personal experience of the game, was also apparent. Furthermore, some interviewees recognised that tension among fans was a feature of soccer around the world, and that the perceived poor quality of local soccer and the lack of success of the NI team in recent years also dissuaded them from supporting NI.



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*However, Catholics are quite positively disposed towards NI international soccer.* Almost as many Catholics (56%) as Protestants (60%) said they would be willing to attend Windsor Park if offered tickets. More Catholics (71%) than Protestants (65%) felt that the IFA was taking active steps to welcome all traditions. This suggests that the efforts of the IFA to eradicate sectarianism from the NI international game have been recognised within the Catholic community. Many interviewees commented upon the good work done by the Football for All campaign. Moreover, two-thirds of Catholic respondents said they would like to see more Catholics supporting the NI international team. Given that soccer is a sport which Protestants and Catholics share, and that success tends to swell support, soccer could conceivably become a force for reconciliation and the creation of a shared identity.

*There is majority public support for an all-Ireland soccer team.* The survey found 54% of respondents in favour of this. However, a majority of these respondents were from the Catholic community, which traditionally feels less affinity with the NI team, or from the no religion group. Thus, while 70% of Catholics agreed with the proposition, a much lower proportion of Protestants (39%) agreed. The level of support for an all-Ireland soccer team is, of course, likely to vary according to performances on the pitch.

*Rugby in NI is overwhelmingly regarded as inclusive and unifying.* A total of 83% of survey respondents believed that Ulster Rugby was taking active steps to welcome all traditions, including almost equal proportions of Protestants and Catholics. Ulster Rugby's ground was also regarded as the most inclusive of the three stadium sports; regarding willingness to attend a rugby match at Ravenhill, 69% of Catholics and 66% of Protestants said they would attend if offered tickets. In the creation of an inclusive image, rugby has a clear advantage over GAA and soccer in that it has both an all-Ireland team, and an Ulster team, thus permitting the expression of different identities in different contexts. TV coverage of Ireland rugby matches attracted equal levels of Protestant and

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Catholic interest, although Ulster rugby attracted a slightly higher proportion of Protestant viewers.

*A large number of people do not participate in sport or physical activity at all.* Over half of the sample (52%) reported doing no sport or physical activity in the last twelve months.

*Sport plays a comparatively minor role in the lives of women.* The present study shows that women watch less sport on TV, experience a lower level of enjoyment of sport at school, and participate in sport less than men, thus exemplifying Kay's (2014, p. 97) assertion that "collectively, girls and women identify with sports far less than do boys and men". Men were twice as likely as women to report doing 'a lot' of sport or physical exercise in the last year. Many interviewees recognised that women faced specific barriers to participation. Women particularly identified a lack of single sex sports/leisure provision, body image, and lack of childcare as barriers to their participation. Furthermore, 59% of the survey sample believed that boys' sports are seen as more important than girls' sports in schools, while 53% thought that more TV coverage of female sport would increase female participation.

*However, many people believe that women do not face sports exclusion.* For instance, although 46% of women agreed that they were second class citizens in NI sport, 32% of women disagreed. Regarding whether responsibility for a young family prevented women from participating in sport or exercise, 42% overall agreed but 40% disagreed. Some interviewees, both male and female, believed that the disparity in levels of participation, greater number of male than female sports clubs, and the differential media coverage of male and female sports, was simply a result of men and women having differing interests.

*Older people are not widely perceived to face significant exclusion from sport.* Just 16% of survey respondents believed that sport and leisure facilities were not welcoming for older people. Most

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interviewees thought that age-appropriate sport/exercise opportunities existed for those older people who were willing to take advantage of them. Barriers such as cost or transport, noted in the Literature Review, were not emphasised in the interviews.

*Older people participate less in sport than younger people and are less likely to attend sporting venues.* This was evident from the survey findings regarding participation levels and willingness to attend the three main sports stadia. The 18-24 category was 16.86 times more likely to report ‘a lot’ of sport/physical activity than the 65+ group, the 25-34 group was 9.32 times more likely, the 35-44 group was 4.8 times more likely, the 45-54 group 3.4 times more likely and the 55-64 group 2.3 times more likely. Those in the 65+ age category were the least likely to report willingness to attend Casement Park, Windsor Park or Ravenhill. Interviewees noted that it may be particularly challenging to interest older people in sport and exercise if they have not been active earlier in life.

*In line with previous research, people in the lowest socio-economic groups participate in sport least; they are also less likely to take part in a sports-based peacebuilding initiative than those in higher socio-economic groups.* This was demonstrated by the survey analysis which showed that people in higher-level occupational classifications were 1.8 times more likely to have taken part than those in the lower-level occupations, and people with A-level qualifications and above were 1.7 times more likely to have taken part than those with GCSEs and below. The interviews showed that cost was perceived to be a barrier to participation although it was felt that this was changing. Just 18% of survey respondents mentioned that cost had been a barrier to them in playing sport at some point in their lives, and many of these were people of ‘higher’ socio-economic status. The availability of affordable sporting opportunities was widely recognised by interviewees. It may be factors other than cost *per se*, such as cultural habits and attitudes, which account for the disparity in participation levels between socio-economic groups.

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*Many people do not believe that sports provision for people with disabilities is adequate.* Nearly half of respondents (49%) agreed that sports for people with disabilities were not taken seriously in NI. However, many interviewees were simply unaware of what sports provision existed for people with disabilities. Interviewees with disabilities attested to the importance of dedicated disability sports workers and the ongoing reality of access problems at sports venues.

*Many LGB people face significant obstacles to engaging in sport and leisure.* Testimony from LGB interviewees confirmed existing research that argues that in sport, “sexuality is mostly coded as heterosexuality and there is little positive room for alternate sexualities. Generally, transgression from these norms around gender and sexuality is punished in sport, and particularly in team sport” (Symons et al., 2010, p. 7). The gendered nature of certain team sports can create a culture which is conducive to homophobia, as several LGB interviewees had experienced. Moreover, LGB interviewees reported that open plan changing rooms and showers were intimidating places, in part because they afforded no privacy and in part because they lent themselves to bullying. Almost one in five (19%) of the survey respondents said they would feel uncomfortable using a changing room at the same time as a gay or lesbian person.

*Different opinions on LGB inclusion in sport exist among the wider public.* For instance, 58% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that a gay or lesbian person would be welcome to join and play for most sports clubs in NI, while 18% disagreed. Among interviewees, some perceived that the position of LGB people was improving, while others thought that NI continued to be a ‘cold house’ for LGB people. However, few interviewees had encountered openly gay sports people or had even thought much about the subject, while nearly one in four (24%) survey respondents neither agreed nor disagreed regarding the question of whether a gay or lesbian person would be welcome to join and play for most sports clubs in NI. Lack of awareness of the issue may be partly a result of the fact that LGB people conceal their sexuality in sporting contexts, or avoid them

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altogether.

*Participating in sport and exercise is extremely difficult for transgender people.* Our review of literature confirmed how, “the established, dominant and well ‘defined gender binary’ reduces the possibilities for new sporting configurations and therefore potentiality for transgender people’s participation” (Caudwell, 2012, p. 15). In keeping with this observation, transgender interviewees in this study described how before, during and after transition, they struggle to find a place in a sports world (changing facilities, teams and competition categories) characterised by male-female segregation. Furthermore, the lack of public understanding of transgender people means that any activity in public is fraught with difficulty. The absence of sporting opportunities can have a detrimental impact on the physical and social wellbeing of transgender people, who are already suffering anxiety and stress as a result of their gender dysphoria. The survey showed that 22% of respondents said they would be uncomfortable sharing a changing room with a transgender person.

*Ethnic minorities are not widely perceived to face serious sports exclusion, though some respondents felt that the impression that there is racism in certain parts of NI may dissuade ethnic minority participation.* Just 15% of survey respondents thought that a person from an ethnic minority group would not be welcome to join and play for most sports clubs in NI, and 7% did not wish their children’s or grandchildren’s sport team to be coached by someone from an ethnic minority group. There was clear public support (71%) for more funding for cross-ethnic sports projects. Indeed, some ethnic minority interviewees believed strongly in the power of sport to help integrate minorities and improve relations with ‘local’ people.

*Ethnic minority experiences of sport in NI are diverse.* Several interviewees had positive experience of sport, but common too were barriers identified by other studies noted in the Literature Review, for example: experiences of racism, both in sporting contexts and elsewhere; the fact that the sports

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preferences of people from NI and from other countries could be incompatible; and lack of information, perhaps in the appropriate language. The sectarian divide was daunting for ethnic minorities to navigate, again, both in relation to sport and in other areas.

## 5.2 Key issues

From the findings of our research, a number of key issues regarding exclusion and peacebuilding arise for government, media and society, schools, sports bodies, and those responsible for sports facilities.

- *While recent progress has been made in resolving remaining conflict legacy issues and disputes over cultural expression, politicians must continue to prioritise these matters.* Such a commitment is outlined in OFMDFM's good relations strategy, *Together: Building a United Community* (OFMDFM, 2013), as well as the Stormont House Agreement, December 2014. Making sports more inclusive requires social changes far beyond the power of sporting organisations, including the removal of murals, flags and other territorial markers, greater sharing in education, housing and social life, and a wider acceptance of differing political identities.
- *The strong public support for sport as a vehicle for peacebuilding, and personal and social development, should continue to inform the direction of government policy and funding in this area.* Specifically, the present research should give added impetus to the focus on sport as a peacebuilding tool contained in *Together: Building a United Community*. Targeted funding is required for initiatives which capture the range of socio-economic groups, rectifying the current imbalance in which people of higher occupational status and educational attainment are most likely to have participated in a sport and reconciliation initiative.

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- *Action at school level is crucial to the task of breaking down sectarian barriers in sport.*

Integrated and shared education and expanding the range of sports on offer in schools would help to loosen the extant strong ties between school, religious community background and sport, and would buttress the shared community agenda contained in *Together: Building a United Community* and the Stormont House Agreement.

- *The GAA should continue, increase, and effectively communicate its inclusivity measures aimed at encouraging people from all traditions and backgrounds to play and watch Gaelic games.*

Protestants and many Catholics still have reservations about the political associations of the GAA. However, the positive light in which many Protestants view both the GAA's values and sports should encourage the organisation in its outreach efforts to that community. The GAA should also invest in proactively taking steps to rectify the current perceptions, of both Protestants and Catholics, that it is an organisation exclusively for Catholics and nationalists.

- *The community relations work by the IFA through its Football for All campaign, as highlighted by respondents in this study, should be continued and extended.* Most people recognise that considerable improvements have been made in recent years regarding NI international soccer and inclusivity, although some people still retain negative views of the sport. To encourage full participation and involvement by all sections of the community, the *Football for All* initiative should continue with its successful campaign work.

- *Ulster Rugby should extend the inclusivity of the sport in NI by encouraging greater involvement of players and supporters from Catholic and working-class Protestant communities.*

Communication efforts devoted to targeting these audiences should be developed to build on the current success, wherein the Ulster rugby team is widely seen as a good example of the unifying potential of sport.

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- *In relation to the contentious issue of flags and anthems in sport, some form of negotiated, synchronised change is required between sports that can command the support of the political parties and the wider public.* Changes to the use of flags and anthems in soccer, rugby or Gaelic games would be controversial, difficult and indeed unlikely. This suggests that in order for sport to be ‘de-politicised’, change must occur to create a community which promotes mutual respect and understanding, is strengthened by its diversity and where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced. This is stated as a key priority for the NI Executive in *Together: Building a United Community*.

- *The GAA, IFA and Ulster Rugby should enhance their communications to the general public about their contribution to peace-building and reconciliation work in NI.* The sports should capitalise on strong public goodwill towards sport as a way of breaking down barriers and maximise the impact of their co-operation and joint cross-community outreach work through more effective public relations and advertising campaigns.

- *The media must take account of how the extent and content of their sports coverage may contribute to the exclusion of women and girls from sport.* Given the paucity of media coverage of female sports, and the stereotypical way in which female athletes are often portrayed, women and girls are denied female sports role models and encouraged to view sport as a male domain. Females should be encouraged to perceive sport and exercise as an integral part of their lives.

- *Schools should ensure that they prioritise girls’ sport as much as boys’.* In addition they should have more shared involvement between girls and boys in sport from an early age, and address the gender expectations (around body image and what activities are and are not appropriate for girls) which may deter girls from involvement sport. While findings show that younger people have more positive views of school sports, schools may nonetheless need to consider the range of sports on



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offer and whether limited choice may be turning girls off sport.

- *Schools should be aware of how early sports experiences can determine whether or not people continue to participate later in life.* Thus, it is imperative that young people's experiences of sport in school are positive. Sports teachers must be vigilant to ensure that sports do not provide opportunities for bullying – of various kinds – and should organise and coach sports in a way that ensures respect for self and others.

- *Sports facilities should monitor the gender balance of users.* If facilities are, or become, male dominated, there may be a case for creating or extending separate sessions for men and women.

- *Facilities should consider the feasibility of providing childcare on site or extending and enhancing such provision.* This would open up sport and physical exercise opportunities for many people, both men and women.

- *Negative attitudes towards LGB and transgender people must continually be challenged at all levels of society.* Considering their specific exclusion from sport, as identified in this research, LGB and transgender people must be made much more visible in publicly funded sports, health and wellbeing social marketing and advertising campaigns.

- *Sports provision for people with disabilities should be enhanced to encourage maximum participation.* This includes sporting facilities and venues, where accessibility for spectators with disabilities continues to be problematic.

- *Targeted communications by sports facilities and organisers – of sporting opportunities and their benefits – are especially important in relation to older people and people with disabilities.* Efforts

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to engage older people and people with disabilities must take into account that those who have not habitually been active may be particularly unreceptive.

- *In the refurbishment or construction of new facilities, authorities should consider the impact of changing room design on the participation of particular groups.* Communal changing rooms present barriers to many people, in particular, transgender people. Sports facilities with individual changing cubicles should clearly communicate in their publicity the availability of this provision to encourage use and decrease anxiety.

- *Negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities must continually be challenged at all levels of society.* Major sports bodies and local authorities should continue current inclusivity initiatives (e.g. Unite Against Hate) to encourage participation of ethnic minority groups.

In conclusion, our findings identify what people in NI view as the barriers to, and the benefits of, sports participation, and how the sectarian divide, gender, age, socio-economic status, disability, sexuality and ethnicity, can impact on social inclusion through sport. Our data contribute to the development of statistical infrastructure on social exclusion in NI, providing statistical benchmarks that can help chart the evolution of attitudes in respect to sport and social exclusion in the future. The data also assist in the understanding of public perceptions and attitudes in relation to cohesion, sharing and integration in Northern Irish society, and highlight how sport presents both challenges and opportunities in NI's ongoing path away from the violence and division of the 'Troubles'.

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## Appendix 1: Interview questions

### **Introductory questions**

1. a) Are you interested in sport, as a spectator or a participant?
- b) What sports are you interested in? [Refer to prompt list]

### **Personal exclusion**

2. a) Are there any sports where you have felt welcomed/where participating was easy? [Refer to prompt list]
- b) Have you ever felt excluded from a sport or faced barriers/difficulties in participating in sport? [Refer to prompt list]
- c) Are there any sports in which you have had an interest but for some reason you have not taken part in? [Refer to prompt list]

### **Groups facing exclusion**

3. Can you think of any types of people who may find it difficult to participate in sport in NI?

#### *Prompts:*

Do you think religious community background affects what sports people play?

If so, how can sports be more inclusive and welcoming to all traditions?

Do you think women face barriers?

If so, how can sports be more inclusive and welcoming to women?

Do you think older people face barriers?

If so, how can sports be more inclusive and welcoming to older people?

Do you think less well-off people face barriers?

If so, how can sports be more inclusive and welcoming to less well-off people?

Do you think people with disabilities face barriers?

If so, how can sports be more inclusive and welcoming to people with disabilities?

Do you think lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people face barriers?

If so, how can sports be more inclusive and welcoming to LGB&T people?

Do you think ethnic minorities face barriers?

If so, how can sports be more inclusive and welcoming to ethnic minorities?

---

### **Inclusion in sport**

4. Are you aware of anything aimed at helping to break down barriers to participation in sport?  
Programmes/initiatives run by sporting organisations/governing bodies/government in NI?

### **Sport in NI**

5. a) Overall, do you think sport has a positive or negative role in NI?  
What sports and why?
- b) Do you think sport has a uniting or dividing role in NI?  
What can be done to make it less divisive/more uniting?
6. a) Which sporting organisations in NI communicate well with you and why?  
Which sporting organisations in NI do not communicate well with you and why?

### **Concluding question:**

Is there anything else you would like to say about sport in NI that you feel is important?

## Appendix 2: NILT survey module

### Sport and Social Exclusion

The next section is about sport in Northern Ireland today.

Q1 Thinking about sport in schools. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

**SHOW CARD**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	N/A
My experience of sport at school has given me a lifelong love of sport	1	2	3	4	5	8	-1
My experience of sport at school put me off sport for good	1	2	3	4	5	8	-1
At my secondary school there was a range of sports on offer that suited different abilities and interests	1	2	3	4	5	8	-1
Boys' sports teams are generally seen as more important by schools than girls' teams when it comes to sport	1	2	3	4	5	8	
Schools often become obsessed with one team sport and forget about all the others	1	2	3	4	5	8	
Segregated schools are a major cause of segregation in sports	1	2	3	4	5	8	

Q2 Was there a sport that you would have liked to have played at your secondary school but wasn't offered?

Yes	1	Ask b
No	2	Go to Q3

b) Which one?

--

Q3 Over the last 12 months, would you say you have watched each of the following sports on television, a lot, a little or not at all?

**SHOW CARD**

	A lot	A little	Not at all	Don't know
English or Scottish premier league soccer matches	1	2	3	8
Gaelic football matches	1	2	3	8
Northern Ireland international soccer matches	1	2	3	8
Republic of Ireland international soccer matches	1	2	3	8
Ireland rugby matches	1	2	3	8

Ulster rugby matches	1	2	3	8
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Q4a Are there any other sports that you have watched a lot over the last 12 months?

Yes	1	Ask b
No	2	Go to Q5

b) Which ones?

--

Q5 How much do you agree or disagree with these statements about sport in Northern Ireland?  
**SHOW CARD**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	DK
There is nothing wrong with different sports or teams being for Protestants or for Catholics	1	2	3	4	5	8
Sport is a good way to break down barriers between Protestants and Catholics	1	2	3	4	5	8
I would like to see more Protestants playing Gaelic sports	1	2	3	4	5	8
Sectarianism puts me off some sports	1	2	3	4	5	8
National anthems should not be part of sport in Northern Ireland	1	2	3	4	5	8
I would like to see more Catholics supporting the Northern Ireland international soccer team	1	2	3	4	5	8

Q6 Thinking about some of the main organisers of team sports in Northern Ireland, do you think that the following organisations are taking active steps to welcome all traditions in Northern Ireland?

**SHOW CARD**

	Yes definitely	Yes probably	No probably not	No definitely not	Don't know
The Gaelic Athletic Association or GAA	1	2	3	4	8
The Irish Football Association or IFA that deals with the Northern Ireland international soccer team	1	2	3	4	8
Ulster Rugby	1	2	3	4	8
The Northern Ireland Football League that deals with local soccer teams (this used to be called the Irish League)	1	2	3	4	8

Q7 Suppose you were given tickets for a GAA match at Casement Park in Belfast. Would you try to go?

Yes	1	Go to Q8
No	2	Ask a

---

a) Why not?

--

Q8 Suppose you were given tickets for an Ulster rugby match at the Ravenhill ground in Belfast. Would you try to go?

Yes	1	Go to Q9
No	2	Ask a

a) Why not?

--

Q9 Suppose you were given tickets for a Northern Ireland International football match at Windsor Park in Belfast. Would you try to go?

Yes	1	Go to Q10
No	2	Ask a

a) Why not?

--

Q10 How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?  
**SHOW CARD**

	Stron gly agree	Agr ee	Neither agree nor disagree	Disag ree	Strongly disagree	DK
Sporting and leisure facilities are welcoming places for older people in NI	1	2	3	4	5	8
A gay or lesbian person would be welcomed to join, and play for most sports clubs in Northern Ireland	1	2	3	4	5	8
A person from a minority ethnic group would be welcomed to join and play for most sports clubs in Northern Ireland	1	2	3	4	5	8
Sports for disabled people are not taken seriously in Northern Ireland	1	2	3	4	5	8
For women with young families there is almost no chance of keeping up their sport or exercise	1	2	3	4	5	8
If there was more TV coverage of women's sport, more women would play	1	2	3	4	5	8
Women are second class citizens in sports in Northern Ireland	1	2	3	4	5	8

Q11. Here are some of the **changes** that could be made to sport in Northern Ireland that other people have said to us. How much do you agree or disagree with each of these?  
**SHOW CARD**



	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
I would like to see a Northern Ireland rugby team instead of an all-Ireland rugby team	1	2	3	4	5	8
I would like to see an all-Ireland soccer team instead of one each for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland	1	2	3	4	5	8
There should be more funding for cross-community sports projects	1	2	3	4	5	8
There should be more funding for cross-ethnic sports projects	1	2	3	4	5	8

Q12 Looking to the future, do you think that in ten years time...READ OUT...

	Yes definitely	Yes probably	No probably not	No definitely not	Don't know
More Protestants will attend GAA matches	1	2	3	4	8
More Catholics will attend Northern Ireland international soccer matches	1	2	3	4	8

Q13 Some people say that on balance, sport in Northern Ireland **breaks down barriers** between Protestants and Catholics, other people say on balance, sport in Northern Ireland **creates barriers**. Which of these statements comes closest to your own view?

Overall, sport in Northern Ireland <b>breaks down barriers</b> between Protestants and Catholics	1
Overall, sport in Northern Ireland <b>creates barriers</b>	2
(Don't know)	8

Q14 Have you ever taken part in a cross-community sporting initiative?

Yes	1	Ask a
No	2	Go Q12

a) Do you think that it (or they) helped break down barriers between Protestants and Catholics?

Yes	
No	
Don't know	

Q15 Do you think that, in general, cross-community sporting initiatives help break down barriers between Protestants and Catholics who take part?

Yes	1
No	2

Q16 How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?  
**SHOW CARD**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	DK
Sports in NI are more open and inclusive for all types of people now than they were 10 years ago	1	2	3	4	5	8
If there were more opportunities for participating in sport in this area there would be less anti-social behaviour	1	2	3	4	5	8
I don't know much about what sport is on offer in my area	1	2	3	4	5	8

Q17 How often you yourself played sport or taken part in any kind of exercise over the last 12 months? Would you say

A lot	1	Ask a
A little	2	
Or not at all	3	Go to Q15

Which sport or exercise do you do the most often?

--

Q18 Sometimes people are **put off** doing sport or exercise for particular reasons. Here is a list of things that people have told us put them off doing a particular sport or exercise. Have any of these ever put **you** off doing a particular sport or type of exercise during your lifetime?

**CODE ALL THAT APPLY**

	Yes	No
There were no facilities nearby	1	2
It cost too much	1	2
I didn't like the changing rooms because they were communal	1	2
No disabled access	1	2
I would have needed to find child care	1	2
I felt embarrassed about how I looked	1	2
I didn't think I would be good enough at it	1	2
I didn't have the time to do it	1	2
It wasn't single sex	1	2
Other reasons (please say what)	1	2
(Just not interested)	1	2

---

## Appendix 3: NILT technical notes

Northern Ireland Life & Times Survey 2013

Technical notes

# Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2013

## Technical Notes

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**Contents**

	Page
What is the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey?	i
Links with other surveys	i
Ethical approval	i
Technical details of the 2013 survey	ii
The overall design	ii
Survey content	ii
Pilot and mainstage fieldwork	ii
Advance mailshot	iii
Sampling design	iii
Response rate	iii
Sampling errors and confidence intervals	iv
Data preparation	iv
Deriving social class variables	v
Getting the data	v
Using the data	v
Notes and errata	vi
Comparison with other surveys	viii
Finding a module in the questionnaires	x
Contact information	x
Other variables on the dataset	xi
The questionnaires	M1
Main questionnaire	M3
Self-completion	SC1

## What is the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey?

The Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) Survey was launched in the autumn of 1998. Its mission is to monitor the attitudes and behaviour of people in Northern Ireland annually to provide a time-series and a public record of how our attitudes and behaviour develop on a wide range of social policy issues. The survey is run on a modular format and while two modules are repeated every year (*Political Attitudes* and *Community Relations*) the rest of the survey varies annually, with all the modules designed to be repeated in years to come.

The survey aims to provide:

- A local resource for use by the general public
- A data source for a more theoretical academic debate

We are extremely grateful to the respondents to the survey and would like to thank them for giving up their time to answer the survey questions. We are also grateful to the interviewers from Perceptive Insight who carried out the survey throughout Northern Ireland. Finally we would like to thank the funders for the 2013 survey who have been most supportive of the overall aims of the project, in particular Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM).

### Links with other surveys

The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey is a direct descendent of the Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Survey (NISA) which ran from 1989 to 1996. NISA was a sister survey to the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA), and, by running the same modules as BSA, it provided a time-series of social attitudes allowing comparisons with Britain. Against the background of the new political arrangements in Northern Ireland it was agreed that the new Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey would be better served by cutting its links with its British counterpart. NILT now carries on the tradition of a time-series of attitudes but has shifted the focus away from comparisons with Britain. It is largely Northern Ireland focused, it is social policy focused, and it is designed to be used by the wider public in Northern Ireland. Nonetheless, every year includes a substantial component which either continues an old NISA time-series, or replicates a BSA module.

### Ethical approval

The 2013 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee in the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work, Queen's University Belfast, where the survey coordinator is based.

## Technical details of the 2013 survey

### The overall design

The 2013 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey involved 1210 face-to-face interviews with adults aged 18 years or over. The number of respondents has been reduced from 1800 as in previous years due to problems in securing funding for the survey. The main interview was carried out using computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) and the respondent was then asked to complete a self completion questionnaire.

The self-completion questionnaire was completed using the following three methods:

- CASI method – the respondent completed the self completion on the iPad.
- CAPI method – the interviewer completed the self completion on the iPad.
- Traditional pen and paper method – the respondent completed the self completion on paper booklet.

In 1998, 1999 and 2000, the Young Life and Times Survey ran alongside the adult survey and interviewed young people aged 12 to 17. However, this methodology was reviewed in 2001. Leading on from this, the Young Life and Times restarted in 2003, but with a different methodology from before, and not linked to the adult survey. (Full details on the Young Life and Times Survey can be found at [www.ark.ac.uk/ylt](http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt))

### Survey content

The survey consists of a number of different modules, each based on a specific topic. The modules included in the 2013 survey are:

#### ***Background information on the respondents***

##### ***Community relations***

##### ***Attitudes to minority ethnic people and migrant workers***

##### ***Sport and social exclusion***

##### ***Attitudes to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) issues***

##### ***Political attitudes***

### Pilot and mainstage Fieldwork

All interviews were conducted by Perceptive Insight interviewers in the respondents' homes. Pilot interviews with 60 respondents were carried out during August/ September 2013. The main stage of the fieldwork was carried out during the period 30<sup>th</sup> September 2013 to 28<sup>th</sup> December 2013. Respondents were asked to complete a CASI (Computer Assisted Self-Interviewing) questionnaire. On agreeing to complete the CASI questionnaire, the respondent was shown how to use the interviewer's iPad to enter answers by completing some example questions. If a respondent did not wish to complete the self-completion questionnaire on the iPad they were given the option to complete a paper version. The paper self-completion questionnaire was completed and handed back to the interviewer at the time of the main interview. If a respondent could not complete the self-completion questionnaire on the iPad or by paper, due to literacy or health issues, the interviewer completed the self-completion questionnaire on the iPad where consent was granted by the respondent.

Advance Letter

An advance letter was issued by Perceptive Insight to all sampled addresses prior to the interviewer calling at each address. The letter explained the purpose and rationale for the survey as well as contact details for the Perceptive Insight staff managing the project.

Sampling design

The sample for the 2013 survey consisted of a systematic random sample of addresses selected from the Postcode Address File (PAF) database of addresses. This is the most up-to-date and complete listing of addresses. Private business addresses were removed from the database prior to sample selection. A total of 2,350 addresses were selected for interview.

The Postcode Address File (PAF) provides a good sampling frame of addresses, but contains no information about the number of people living at an address. Further selection stages were therefore required to convert the listing of addresses to a listing of individuals from which one person (the 'selected respondent') is chosen to complete the questionnaire.

The person to be interviewed was randomly selected using the 'next birthday' rule. The interviewer asked the householder to list the birthdays of all members of the household eligible for inclusion in the sample: that is, all persons aged 18 or over living at the address. The person with the next birthday, at the time of the call, was the person with whom the interview was to be conducted. Where the selected respondent was not available, an appointment was made to call back to interview them at a more suitable time.

Response rate

**Table 1.1** shows the status of addresses, and the number of addresses in scope.

**Table 1.2** shows the breakdown of response

**Table 1.3** shows the response rate for the self completion questionnaires.

<b>Table 1.1 Status of addresses</b>		
Total addresses issued	Ineligible (eg vacant/derelict/commercial)	Total in scope
2350	197	2153

<b>Table 1.2 Breakdown of response</b>		
	Number	Percent
Total co-operating	1210	56
Fully co-operating	1209	55
Partially co-operating	1	0
Refusal to co-operate	623	29
Non-contact	320	15
Total	2153	

<b>Table 1.3 Completed self completion questionnaires</b>	
Number of main stage interviews	1210
Number of self-completion achieved	1209
% of self completion achieved	100



Sampling errors and confidence intervals

**Table 1.4** sets out sampling errors and confidence intervals at the 95% confidence level relating to a Systematic Random Sample design as used in the survey. Note that the margin of error for all sample estimates is within the parameters of  $\pm 2.8\%$ .

<b>Table 1.4 Sampling errors and confidence intervals for key variables (unweighted data)</b>				
		%	Standard Error of p (%)	95% Confidence Limits
<b>Age</b>	18 – 24	7.4	0.7	5.9 – 8.9
	25 – 34	15.5	1.0	13.5 – 17.5
	35 – 44	18.8	1.1	16.6 – 21.0
	45 – 54	19.3	1.1	17.1 – 21.5
	55 – 64	13.7	1.0	11.8 – 15.6
	65 and over	25	1.2	22.6 – 27.4
<b>Sex</b>	Male	44.9	1.4	42.1 – 47.7
	Female	55.1	1.4	52.3 – 57.9
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	30.7	1.3	28.1 – 33.3
	Married/Civil Partnership	44	1.4	41.2 – 46.8
	Separated	3.9	0.6	2.8 – 5.0
	Divorced	9.4	0.8	7.8 – 11.0
	Widowed	11.9	0.9	10.1 – 13.7
<b>Religion</b>	Catholic	40.1	1.4	37.3 – 42.9
	Protestant	40.5	1.4	36.9 – 42.5
	None	17.4	1.1	15.3 – 19.5
	Other	1.2	0.5	1.9 – 3.7

Data preparation

Main survey data was collected via the snap computer aided interviewing package. This was converted to SPSS format prior to analysis. All paper based data (self completion modules) were also entered via the snap package and again converted to SPSS. All data were subject to an extensive range of inter and intra variable logic checks.



Deriving social class variables

Occupational information was derived using the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2010. The SOC2010 information was also used to derive the National Statistics Socio-Economic (NS SEC) and the ISCO 08 COM variables both of which are contained in this data set.

Getting the data

Survey results are put on the Internet six months after the end of fieldwork (<http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt>), with frequencies for every question and a breakdown by age, gender and religion on offer.

A 'query' service or helpline is run for those who need additional tables or have any query about the survey. Users can contact the Life and Times team directly (see Contact Information on page ix). A leaflet advertising the existence of the data and how to get hold of it is also sent to schools, voluntary groups, civil servants, journalists and assembly members. The funders of the survey receive the dataset somewhat earlier than the public (three months after the end of fieldwork). Nonetheless, one of the guiding principles of the survey is that the information is made available to all and that no one person or organisation has ownership of the results. The web site also allows users to download the data in order to carry out their own particular statistical analyses.

Using the data

The documentation provided here is not a traditional 'technical report' and is designed to be easy to use rather than technically exhaustive. Users who intend to carry out sophisticated statistical analyses or to manipulate the data to investigate particular features may well want to come back to us for more precise details on the survey set-up.

The data have been tested extensively, but if you do find anything that looks like a mistake, please let us know as soon as you can.

**Please note that all analyses of the adult data should be weighted in order to allow for disproportionate household size. The weighting variable is called WTFactor. The only exceptions are the few household variables (for example, tenure and household income), which do not need to be weighted.**

## Notes and Errata

### Categorisation of Religion

At the back of this documentation is a list of other variables on the dataset. This includes the variable RELIGCAT, which categorises the variable RELIGION into 3 groups: Catholic, Protestant and No religion. The original RELIGION variable has been removed from the dataset in order to protect anonymity of respondents.

The Protestant category within the RELIGCAT variable was created by grouping together the following denominations:

- Church of Ireland/Anglican/Episcopal
- Baptist
- Methodist
- Presbyterian
- Free Presbyterian
- Brethren
- United Reform Church (URC)/Congregational
- Pentecostal
- Church of Scotland
- Elim Pentecostal
- Reformed Presbyterian
- Non-subscribing Presbyterian
- Salvation Army
- Church of Nazarene
- Jehovah's Witness
- Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormon)
- Protestant – no denomination
- Christian – no denomination
- Other Protestants as described in 'other' answer
- Other Christians as described in 'other' answer.

From 2008, the demographic and socio-economic questions asked in the NILT survey have been harmonised to match those used in large-scale government surveys. Thus, some of these will be different to those asked in previous years of NILT. However, this harmonisation will increase comparability between NILT and other surveys.

### Confidentiality

In order to maintain confidentiality, demographic variables relating to other people in the household are excluded from the dataset, as is the RACE2 variable. Variables relating to religion are also excluded, and are replaced by the following recoded versions of these variables:

Variable	Recoded version
RELIGION	RELIGCAT
FAMRELIG	FAMRCODE
PRTNRRLG	PRTRCODE

However, tables of results for these variables can be found on the NILT website ([www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2013](http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2013))

## Comparison with other surveys

## Comparison of household characteristics

		NILT 2013*	CHS 2012/13	Northern Ireland Census 2011
<i>Characteristics of sampled households</i>			All households	
<i>Tenure</i>	Owned outright	37	36	32
	Owned with mortgage/co-ownership	30	30	35
	Rented Local Authority	13	12	12
	Rented other***	20	20	18
	Rent free	1	1	3
	Refused	0	-	-
Base=100%		1,210	<b>2,710</b>	703,275

\* Household characteristics are based on unweighted data from the NILT survey

\*\*\* 'Rented' includes rented from a housing association and rented privately

## Comparison of individual characteristics (weighted data)

		NILT 2013	CHS 2012/13	Northern Ireland Census 2011
			%	
<i>Individual characteristics</i>			18+	
<i>Sex</i>	Male	46	48	49
	Female	54	52	51
<i>Age</i>	18-24	11	11	13
	25-34	15	17	18
	35-44	18	18	18
	45-54	21	33*	18
	55-64	14	-	14
	65 and over	21	20	19
Base=100%	n	1,210	5,020	1,380,100
			18+	
<i>Marital Status</i>	Single	29	30	36
	Married/Civil Partner	55	55	48
	Widowed	8	-	7
	Divorced/Separated	9	15**	9
	Refused/ Don't know	0		
Base=100%	n	1,210	5,020	1,431,540

\* The percentage of respondents aged 45 to 64

\*\* Includes those divorced, separated and widowed

**Individual characteristics – NILT 2013 (weighted data)**

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-64	65 and over	Refused	All
	%						
Single	99	51	24	10	11		29
Married/Civil Partner	2	43	68	71	52		55
Divorced/separated/ widowed	0	6	9	18	37		17
Refused/ Don't know	0	0	0	0	0		0
Base=100%	133	179	212	429	253	4	1,210

**Individual characteristics – CHS 2012/13**

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-64	65 and over	All
	%					
Single	97	57	23	11	8	30
Married/Civil Partner	3	40	68	71	59	55
Divorced/separated/ widowed	1	3	10	18	33	15
Base=100%	559	856	922	1663	1020	5,020

**Stated religious denomination**

	NILT 2013 (weighted)	CHS 2012/13	Northern Ireland Census 2011
	%		
Protestant	39	50	48
Catholic	43	42	45
Other or no religion	17	7	6
Missing/refused	1	1	1
Base=100%	1,210	6,732	1,108,63

\* Include 'no religion' and religion not stated  
 \*\* Supplemented from household membership

## Contact information

**Lizanne Dowds**

**ARK**

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URL: [www.ark.ac.uk/nilt](http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt)

## Other variables on the dataset

<i>WEIGHT2</i>	<b>Weighting variable</b>																				
<i>RAGECAT</i>	<b>Age of respondent (categorised)</b> <table> <tr><td>1</td><td>18-24</td></tr> <tr><td>2</td><td>25-34</td></tr> <tr><td>3</td><td>35-44</td></tr> <tr><td>4</td><td>45-54</td></tr> <tr><td>5</td><td>55-64</td></tr> <tr><td>6</td><td>65+</td></tr> </table>	1	18-24	2	25-34	3	35-44	4	45-54	5	55-64	6	65+								
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<i>NSSECRESP08(R</i> <i>espondent)</i> <i>NSSECPART08</i> <i>(Partner)</i> <i>NSSECHHLD08</i> <i>(Household)</i>	<b>National Statistics Socio Economic Classification (NS SEC)</b> <table> <tr><td>1.1</td><td>Large employers and higher managerial occupations</td></tr> <tr><td>1.2</td><td>Higher professional occupations</td></tr> <tr><td>2</td><td>Lower managerial and professional occupations</td></tr> <tr><td>3</td><td>Intermediate occupations</td></tr> <tr><td>4</td><td>Small employers and own account workers</td></tr> <tr><td>5</td><td>Lower supervisory and technical occupations</td></tr> <tr><td>6</td><td>Semi-routine occupations</td></tr> <tr><td>7</td><td>Routine occupations</td></tr> <tr><td>8</td><td>Never worked and long-term unemployed</td></tr> <tr><td>9</td><td>Not classified</td></tr> </table>	1.1	Large employers and higher managerial occupations	1.2	Higher professional occupations	2	Lower managerial and professional occupations	3	Intermediate occupations	4	Small employers and own account workers	5	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	6	Semi-routine occupations	7	Routine occupations	8	Never worked and long-term unemployed	9	Not classified
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